20 YEARS

of Linking the History of European Nations

ENRS

The exhibition project 'After the Great War: A New Europe 1918–1923' marked the beginning of my involvement with the ENRS, and it was a fantastic experience. That initial encounter led me to become a member of the ENRS Assemblies, which has also been a truly rewarding personal journey. Absolutely every event and activity organised by the ENRS – regardless of the country or location – has brought together remarkable people from diverse places and cultures, from established experts to young professionals just starting their careers. All of them, driven by an interest in the past and a concern for the present, wanted to explore history, discover its stories and learn its lessons. The ENRS provided them with precisely that opportunity.

PROFESSOR MARCELA SĂLĂGEAN
Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Member of the ENRS Academic Council

The ENRS is for me the symbol of how great thoughts, great ideas can be turned into great actions. In spite of all the serious discussions about differences and similarities of Nazi, fascist and communist systems, the peace treaties following the First and Second World Wars, the causes and consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Bloc in 1989–90 and many other controversial issues, we have always found solutions. (...) The ENRS activities of two decades prove that a well-structured team under the leadership of my good friend, Rafał Rogulski, can help in finding ways and means of reconciliation without making the parties involved give up their principles. Very serious problems are dealt with in a friendly, easy-going manner, always respecting the dignity of our partners; this is a well-proven ENRS method of conflict solution. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to participate in this work!

PROFESSOR ATTILA PÓK
Deputy Director of the Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Chairman of the ENRS Academic Council

The ENRS creates a bridge between nations that in the past treated one another with distrust and often hostility. Dialogue within the network thus helps to heal the deep wounds that our nations suffered in the 20th century. Within the framework of the ENRS and a process of discussion and consensus, unique projects have been implemented and are being created. These help the younger generations especially to understand fully the cause of past conflicts and loss of freedom, as well as the consequences of a totalitarian regime. Among the many activities I would like to specifically mention the Freedom Festival organised by the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute in cooperation with the ENRS, which each year reminds us in several places in Slovakia how precious freedom is and how difficult it was to acquire. With its multi-genre character and public interest, the Freedom Festival represents one of the top events of European importance in its category.
After a period of relative stability and peace in Europe, we are currently experiencing a turbulent time associated with uncertainty. Dynamic changes ask new social and even civilisational value questions to us, which we can only successfully answer through mutual cooperation. I therefore believe that the ENRS will continue to represent a place of meetings, mutual respect and the desire to seek the truth, with the help of which we will succeed in filling in the empty spaces of our history through our joint efforts. I would like to thank the entire network, as well as all participants in its activities, for the work done in the first 20 years of its existence and wish it continuing success in making courageous and wise decisions in implementing new projects and overcoming challenges. It was an honour to be part of the Steering Committee.

DR JÁN PÁLFFY
Member of the Board of Directors of the Nation's Memory Institute
Member of the ENRS Steering Committee in 2019–22

Romania's membership in the ENRS is important for the broad community of those who study and bring 20th-century history to the public's attention because it offers the opportunity to work on high-quality international projects. The intense activity of Romanian institutions in projects carried out together with the ENRS contributes to the effort to keep democratic ideals alive, historical memory being a pillar of an open society. After more than a decade of collaboration with the team led by Rafał Rogulski, I am still impressed by the energy and professionalism they demonstrate. Congratulations!

DR FLORIN ABRAHAM
Director of the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism

I first came across the ENRS about 10 years ago when they invited me to speak at one of their conferences. In the years since then they have introduced me to a whole network of people, institutions and points of view that I might never have come across on my own in the UK. In these uncertain times, we need organisations like the ENRS more than ever. The generations who lived through the Second World War are now leaving us, and there is a danger that the lessons they learned will be lost along with them. The ENRS and its partner institutions work tirelessly to preserve our collective memory of that terrible conflict – not by promoting a single narrative, but by promoting dialogue between multiple different narratives about the same communal events. They are the very model of European collaboration. It is only through this kind of work that we can pass on the lessons learned by our grandparents, and make sure that when we say the words 'Never again', we truly mean them.

KEITH LOWE
Writter

Over the course of its 20 years of activity, the ENRS has attained very high standards. Its annual symposia, academic projects, travelling exhibitions and outreach initiatives are all distinguished by meticulous preparation, the highest scholarly quality and a keen sense of aesthetics. Collective memory is not merely a field of academic enquiry, but very often is also an arena of conflict, tension, politics, emotion and rivalry.
The ENRS manages to navigate the turbulent waters of Europe's memory and leads us in new directions during these challenging times. It brings together representatives of widely differing sensitivities, ideological orientations, nationalities and backgrounds at conferences and meetings; fosters dialogue on the most difficult topics; takes up tough subject matter and seeks common ground – all of this must be recognised as a great success. I believe this work is immensely valuable: it allows us to connect the histories of Europe's nations, brings us closer together and upholds our faith in the purpose and vitality of the European project.

MAREK MUTOR
Deputy Director of the National Ossolinski Institute, Wrocław

Twenty Years of the ENRS

CONTENTS

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with profound respect and purpose that we present the vision and forthcoming projects of the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS) for the years ahead. This moment invites reflection on two significant milestones: the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the 20th anniversary of the founding of our network. These occasions compel us to reaffirm our commitment to fostering dialogue, remembrance and solidarity, even as we confront an increasingly complex and polarised global landscape.

For two decades, the ENRS has served as a vital nexus of memory and scholarship, providing a platform for critical engagement with Europe's 20th-century history. This era, shaped by wars, totalitarian regimes, resistance movements and enduring struggles for human rights, continues to challenge our understanding of the past. The network remains unwavering in its belief that only through a nuanced and inclusive exploration of this history can we contribute to a future grounded in mutual respect, empathy and cooperation.

This year, we proudly welcome the Czech Republic as the newest member of the ENRS, joining Poland, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. Their inclusion not only strengthens our collective mission but also stresses the importance of uniting diverse perspectives to confront the challenges of memory in a divided Europe. Together, we strive to elevate historical dialogue beyond national narratives, fostering a transnational culture of remembrance that bridges divisions and challenges distortions.

At a time when the responsibilities of historical dialogue are both more urgent and more demanding, the role of the ENRS has never been more critical. The ongoing war on the borders of the ENRS member and observer countries, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, continues to bring devastation, while the Israel-Hamas conflict exacerbates global instability. We are confronted daily with atrocities that seemed relegated to history – war crimes, forced displacements, cultural destruction and even threats of nuclear attack.

As we commemorate two decades of dialogue and reflection, we are reminded that memory is not a static record of the past but a dynamic force that informs our values and guides our responses to the challenges of the present.

In this context, the memory of the Second World War and its aftermath remains profoundly relevant. To address these enduring challenges, the ENRS has launched the campaign 'WWII – 80 Years After' to explore the lessons of the war and their impact on contemporary Europe and beyond. This initiative aims to remind people of what can happen when values such as democracy and the rule of law, tolerance and social plurality are lost, and when the freedom of the press and media is threatened. It includes commemorative activities, debates, exhibitions and educational projects, aiming to engage diverse audiences to reflect on the war's legacy and its continued resonance in today's world. All of this is **'guided by the spirit of reconciliation, linking the history of Europe's nations and contributing to the development of the European culture of remembrance in order to strengthen mutual trust and build friendly relations amongst the states involved'**, as stated in the ENRS foundational document signed in 2005.

The campaign's focus on the enduring relevance of wartime memory aligns seamlessly with the themes explored at the 12th European Remembrance Symposium, held in May 2024 at the Polish History Museum in Warsaw. Examining the continuing struggle for freedom and its commemoration, the symposium highlighted how historical fights for independence resonate within contemporary cultural memory. Under the theme 'Commemorating and Narrating Freedom', the discussions examined the role of museums as participatory spaces for engagement and assessed the implications of new technologies, including AI and immersive media, in shaping historical narratives. These deliberations set the stage for the 13th European Remembrance Symposium, scheduled for June 2025 in Helsinki, which commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Titled 'The Spirit of Helsinki Then and Now', this symposium will focus on the act's enduring contributions to diplomacy, security and human rights, addressing its relevance amid today's geopolitical challenges.

The forthcoming catalogue offers an expansive overview of the ENRS's initiatives, ranging from educational platforms including 'Hi-story Lessons', which confront historical disinformation, to innovative projects such as 'Sound in the Silence', engaging younger generations through artistic and historical inquiry. Essays from distinguished historians and educators invite deep reflection on the intersections of memory, history and identity in an evolving world.

As we commemorate two decades of dialogue, we are reminded that memory is not a static record of the past but a dynamic force that informs our values and guides our responses to the challenges of the present. The ENRS remains resolute in its mission to cultivate spaces where diverse voices converge, fostering a shared understanding of Europe's intricate and interconnected history. This mission has become increasingly important in the two decades since the ENRS was founded and is more relevant today than ever before.

We would like to thank all those who have supported the ENRS and who continue to do so today: the many partner institutions throughout Europe; the European Union for its financial support; the committed members of the Advisory Board and the Academic Council; advocates in politics and society; contributors to our projects and events; and especially the Director and the dedicated staff of the ENRS Secretariat, whose tremendous commitment has made the ENRS's success possible.

THE ENRS STEERING COMMITTEE

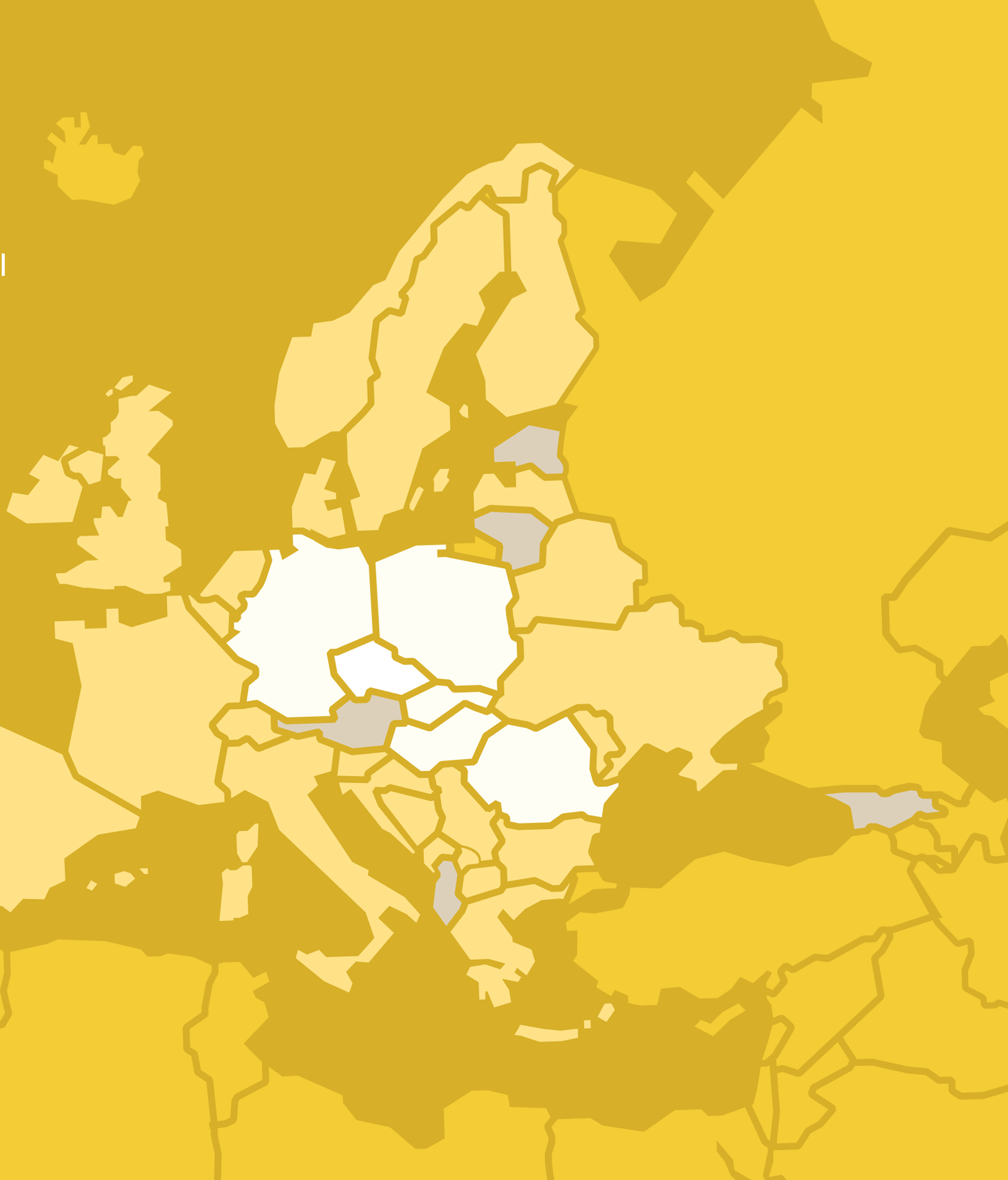
Dr Florin Abraham
Dr Réka Földváryné Kiss
Dr Ladislav Kudrna
Professor Jan Rydel
Dr Jerguš Sivoš
Professor Matthias Weber

ABOUT THE NETWORK

WHO WE ARE

The European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, founded in 2005, is an international initiative whose aim is to support dialogue and enhance the public's knowledge of the history of 20th-century Europe and European cultures of remembrance, with particular emphasis on periods of dictatorships, wars and resistance to political violence.

The members of the network are Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with representatives from Albania, Austria, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia and Lithuania present in its advisory bodies.



ENRS's member countries

ENRS's observer countries

Countries with partner institutions

Our Mission

Guided by the spirit of friendship, we combine a sound knowledge of history with innovative, thought-provoking teaching.

We look for platforms of dialogue and mutual understanding so that present and future generations can use 20th-century history as a source of knowledge and experience.

We are developing a network of institutions dealing with 20th-century history in order to cooperate in the spirit of objectivity, openness and mutual respect.

We care about the language of historical debates held on the basis of the most recent studies of history and memory.

Areas of Operation

We deliver our own projects as well as collaborate with research centres, public institutions and nongovernmental organisations from across Europe.

We carry out our mission by disseminating historical knowledge and supporting research, and in particular by:

- Organising conferences, symposiums, seminars and workshops;
- Delivering research and cultural and educational projects;
- Conducting information campaigns;
- Publishing and translating works for academic as well as general audiences.

We believe that meaningful historical knowledge begins with dialogue. In a fractured world, we create space for people to meet across borders and perspectives, guided by a spirit of openness and friendship.

We bring historical thinking into public life, encouraging reflection in exhibitions and in everyday conversations.

ENRS Guidelines for International Discourse on History and Memory

Committed to shaping global debates on history and remembrance, the ENRS has issued 'Guidelines for International Discourse on History and Memory'. Signed by its Steering Committee and assemblies, the document sets standards for responsible historical projects. Institutions and individuals are invited to add their signatures.

Historical memory is one of the cornerstones in the identity and heritage of individuals and communities. It plays a fundamental role in shaping relationships between countries and peoples and may also be a source of tension and conflict. Initiatives such as permanent and temporary museum exhibitions, monuments, literary works, documentaries and historical films, websites and other creative works aimed at developing a historical view of one or more peoples and states are instruments of international historical discourse. These activities, influenced by political factors – either directly through commissioned projects or indirectly through project financing – become acts of international politics of memory.

In formulating these guidelines for international historical discourse and politics of memory, we are mindful that objectivism, openness and tolerance are the best means of depicting reality, including historical reality. We also consider the promotion of peace and the development of international cooperation, alongside the strengthening of democracy and human rights, as the overriding goals of international policy in the 21st century.

1 Present varied viewpoints

Those developing initiatives in international historical discourse and international politics of memory should strive to ensure the presentation of historical events reliably takes into account the viewpoints, reasoning and arguments of all those involved in such events. Encouraging totalitarian, racist and chauvinistic visions of the world and of history is unacceptable..

2 Avoid deterministic expressions

Those developing the above initiatives should ensure that they avoid suggesting to audiences that there is an inevitable dependence between historical events and the current relations between peoples and states.

3 Avoid generalisations

The content of all international politics of memory initiatives should be commensurate with the nature and scope of the historical phenomena they concern. Individual facts with positive or negative significance, even if in themselves historically verified, should not be used to illustrate the attitudes and conduct of an entire community. Each such fact should be presented in a context reflecting its actual place in the history of a given community.

4 Treat historical figures as individuals

In order to avoid fostering and spreading stereotypes that could be applied to entire communities, when portraying both crimes and commendable historical actions, those developing international historical discourse and international politics of memory initiatives should make every effort to ensure that the persons behind such actions, that is the perpetrators, are identified as precisely as possible and presented in an individualised manner.

5 Ensure a genuine historical basis

The inclusion of completely fictional storylines in works about history poses the risk of consciously or unconsciously distorting the presentation of the past. For this reason, those developing such works should make every effort to ensure that the figures and events presented correspond as closely as possible to the historical context.

6 Clearly define the nature of each initiative

In order to facilitate the audience's interpretation of international historical discourse and international politics of memory initiatives, those developing such initiatives should make every effort to clearly inform the audience of the work's position as historical documentation, fiction, a historical work of fiction or other, depending on the relationship between the fictional storylines in their works and historical and documentary elements.

7 Use academic knowledge as your source

With regard to historical context, each international historical discourse and international politics of memory initiative should be based on current academic findings applicable to its content. During development, the content of such initiatives should be discussed with recognised academic experts representing specialist knowledge on a given phenomenon. The extent of academic consultation should be adequate to the planned project and its budget. All those developing initiatives are required to confirm that an academic consultation has taken place to a specified scope, and to include the name of the consultant in the information on a given initiative (e.g. opening/closing credits of a film or exhibition programme).

8 Apply up-to-date didactical concepts and technical standards

When presenting texts, visual materials (images, films, maps), audio material or artifacts, try to apply didactical concepts that are state of the art and that enable the audience to experience varied viewpoints. Follow international standards and guidelines when indicating your sources and creating an adequate contextual environment for your material. Be aware that information in its digital form needs a specific hypertextual structure and a sustainable technological framework. In case there is too little expertise for the task in hand, try to cooperate with experts in education and computer science.

Read the full text and show your support by signing the declaration.

ENRS GROWTH THROUGH THE YEARS

2004
Negotiations between culture ministers and history experts. Representatives of Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia take part in the proceedings.

2005
Signing of a declaration establishing the ENRS. The original document is signed by Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia; Austria and the Czech Republic become observer countries.

2010
The first Assemblies meeting is held in Warsaw. The meeting leads to creation of the ENRS Warsaw office.

2014
Romania becomes a member of the ENRS. The accession of Romania is the first extension of the network since its establishment.

2015
Albania joins the observer countries of the ENRS.

2019
Georgia joins the observer countries of the ENRS.

2020
Estonia joins the observer countries of the ENRS.

2021
Lithuania joins the observer countries of the ENRS.

2025
The Czech Republic becomes a member of the ENRS.

Learn more about ENRS history.

50

AUDIO AND
VIDEO RECORDINGS

15

INTERNATIONAL
PROJECTS

1.5 MILLION+

VIEWS ON
SOCIAL MEDIA

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

Every year at the ENRS is intense. In 2024 we implemented and co-organised a total of 15 international, primarily interdisciplinary projects across 11 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania and Slovakia). These projects included four conferences, three information campaigns, two exhibitions presented in eleven locations, three educational programmes for secondary school and university students as well as teachers and the development of a multilingual educational portal.

Additionally, we hosted over 20 smaller accompanying events throughout Europe. These included debates, educational webinars and workshops, podcasts, curatorial tours and publications.

As a result of these activities, we produced nearly 50 audio and video recordings and clips. We cooperated with 81 partner institutions from 19 countries (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom).

Our social media entries reached almost 1,500,000 views on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Rafał Rogulski, Director of the ENRS, at the 12th European Remembrance Symposium in Warsaw, 2024.

From Conflict to Conversation: Reflecting on 20 Years of the ENRS

INTERVIEW WITH RAFAŁ ROGULSKI

Director of the ENRS

The European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS) is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. How would you assess these two decades? What have we accomplished as an organisation during this time? What has changed in the world and within the network itself, and of course in the context of broader changes across Europe?

RR: In order to value the development of the ENRS, it is worth looking at this endeavour from a slightly longer perspective. The ENRS was born out of a conflict that emerged in Central Europe at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, primarily concerning the memory of the Second World War and its aftermath.

The dispute was sparked by German plans to commemorate the suffering of Third Reich citizens forcibly displaced after the border changes in Central and Eastern Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War by, among other things, creating a new institution. It was originally intended to be called the 'Centre for Expellees', and its concept only had room to reflect on the time after 1945 and the fate of Germans as victims of the Second World War. There was a lack of context, a lack of intersection between the years 1933, 1938, 1939, that is, the unleashing of the Second World War, and 1945 and the subsequent years, in short, the consequences of this war. This was due to the interpretative doctrine applied by the Union of Expellees, which was behind the project, separating effects from causes and based on the thesis that one lawless act cannot be a justification for another. This thesis allowed a large part of the circles of the so-called expellees and those sympathetic to it, the comfort of focusing on the commemoration of their own victims without a sense of co-responsibility for their fate, for the claim was rejected that if the Germans had not unleashed the Second World War and drowned Europe in blood, the change of borders and the consequent displacement of millions of people from east to west would not have taken place.

The dispute then proceeded at all possible levels. Both parliaments and top politicians, and also academics and journalists were involved. Finally, between 2003 and 2005, negotiators from Poland, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Austria sat down at the table. As a result of several

rounds of talks, on 2 February 2005, at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, the representatives of the first four countries signed a declaration of intent to set up a European Network Remembrance and Solidarity - an international institution whose members would be the states, and whose task would be to support and co-shape dialogue on the history of the 20th century in Europe, with particular emphasis on the causes, course and effects of both world wars, of both totalitarianisms - communism and Nazism - as well as all other significant aspects of the history of Europeans in the 20th century.

In 2009 we resumed discussions with Minister Przewoźnik and Minister Tomasz Merta. We began considering how to implement this initiative and give it institutional form. Establishing a new cultural institution would have required a multilateral international agreement, a protracted and challenging endeavour necessitating ratification by multiple parliaments, which we deemed unrealistic. Minister Merta then proposed inaugurating the Secretariat under the auspices of the National Centre for Culture (NCK). The NCK is an established organisation that has been running excellent cultural projects in Poland for many years.

From left to right: Minister Andrzej Przewoźnik, Minister Tomasz Merta and Professor Matthias Weber during the official Assemblies' Meeting in Warsaw, April 2010.

Thus, on 1 April 2010, I joined the NCK specifically to form the network's Secretariat. Between 2010 and late 2014, we operated as a section within the NCK. During that time, we launched our first projects: 'Genealogies of Memory' and subsequently the European Remembrance Symposium.

From the outset, we set a few basic assumptions. First, we agreed that every project must be international in nature and address themes of relevance to more than two countries. Secondly, that each project would be implemented in partnership with at least one institution from another country. Thirdly, that our most important projects would recur at least once a year, offering participants (and ourselves) the chance to develop and refine their concepts. Fourthly, we decided we would seek funding not only from the member states but also from the European Union. However, to achieve that, it was necessary to lay the groundwork for the projects, launch them and prove that they could succeed.

Indeed, we accomplished this fairly quickly, thanks to a large-scale undertaking called 'Freedom Express'. It was the exceptionally creative Krzysztof Dudek, then director of the NCK, who suggested that we do something truly big and noteworthy for the anniversary of the fall of communism. And so we did. We devised the project. Originally, it was supposed to be a train carrying an exhibition and a group of young international participants. In the end, we produced an exhibition shown in eight countries, designed by Mirosław Nizio, while the journey of young people following the trail of freedom took place separately. That project enabled us to grow and broaden our perspective on our activities. At that time, we were among the few institutions that saw the 25th anniversary of the fall of communism not simply as an isolated event, but as a crucial component of a process that started somewhere in the 1930s. Symbolically, one could trace this back to the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and the ensuing Second World War. Put succinctly, this was the moment of lost freedom and 1989–90 marked its recovery. We strongly believed that one could not explain to Europeans, especially in the West but also in our own region, why 1989–90 and the fall of communism and the Iron Curtain were so significant without conveying that it was the culmination of a process started in 1939 (or even earlier, for some). This perspective was somewhat distinctive and more in depth. It also convinced us that educational and exhibition projects were well worth investing in. The 'Freedom Express' exhibition taught us that if we create an excellent, engaging exhibition – with a compelling narrative, restrained text, high-quality photos, an appealing aesthetic and the possibility to view it, for instance, at night – it will attract many people's attention.

In total, these 20 years of the network's activity encompass more than 250 projects carried out in various countries, in partnership with over 500 institutions. Around 70 employees have worked at the network, plus many other contributors from different organisations.

Another milestone in the network's development was the exhibition 'After the Great War', prepared for the centenary of the end of the First World War. We wanted to show what happened in Eastern Europe, where geographical reconfigurations, border shifts and social transformations were most profound. We aimed to present how Eastern Europe took shape at that time, and thus how our continent and today's reality were formed. We decided to illustrate those intricate processes, ranging from women's rights and the fight for suffrage, the emergence of new democratic state structures to the challenge of restoring normality after the enormous tragedy of the First World War.

Our focus was on Central Europe, but we also included certain connections to Southern and Western Europe. We sought to depict not only those processes, but also the *memory* of them – namely, what divides Central Europe. For the reality is history can be a divisive force. This is a real issue that an institution such as ours must grapple with. The exhibition was displayed in nearly 30 cities across Europe; it can now be viewed online. That was our success on the European stage. We received a four-year structural grant from the European Commission, plus additional grants for specific projects.

In total, these 20 years of the network's activity encompass more than 250 projects carried out in various countries, in partnership with over 500 institutions. Around 70 employees have worked at the network, plus many other contributors from different organisations. These figures are far from irrelevant, because it is through people that a dialogue on history unfolds. From that vantage point, I feel undisguised satisfaction with what we have achieved.

Meanwhile, it is worth adding that we also explored several methods to encourage new countries to join the network. Our greatest success was that, in 2014, Romania became a full member as did Czech Republic in 2025. In addition, Georgia, Albania, Lithuania and Estonia joined the group of observer members. Now, after full accession of the Czech Republic, we hope for Austrian

Signing of the founding declaration of the ENRS by the Ministers responsible for cultural affairs from Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland on 2 February 2005. From left to right: Waldemar Dąbrowski (Poland), Christina Weiss (Germany) and Rudolf Chmel (Slovakia).

From left to right: Bogdan Zdrojewski and Hunor Kelemen, Ministers of Culture of Poland and Romania; Werner Lauk, German Ambassador to Romania; and Ondrej Krajňák, Director of the Slovak Nation's Memory Institute, at the signing of Romania's accession to the ENRS.

membership shortly. Both countries did not sign the declaration in 2005, so it is high time to do this. In so doing, we became part of Europe-wide discussions relating to 20th-century history.

The last 20 years do not only concern history but also the present day – and ours is a present marked by significant conflicts, starting with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, the migration crisis of 2015 and continuing with the years 2020–23: the pandemic, the full-scale war in Ukraine, a new phase of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and unrest in Georgia and Moldova. If we also consider disinformation and the growing influence of far-right and pro-Russian parties, Europe's future seems rather bleak. Tell me: should an institution dealing with historical policy comment on current affairs? And if so, how might it do so?

RR: I think that everything we do is about the present. Paradoxically, by engaging with history, we speak about today. The primary aim of such an institution is to foster peace, which we hope to achieve through a deeper understanding among people living in various European countries and, indeed, around the world. This objective will remain forever unfinished: there will always be new generations to educate on this history. Meanwhile, the world is not standing still, and our engagement with the 19th and 20th centuries acquires greater significance precisely because we link those past events to our imperfect, conflict-ridden present. In doing so, we increase our chances of understanding what happened before, ensuring that, at least within parts of Europe, disputes between nations are not resolved by force. Many of these issues, after all, have historical roots.

As an organisation, I believe we nurture the conviction that, despite all obstacles, it is worthwhile discussing these matters, because we know that dialogue can indeed bring us closer to mutual understanding. I am well aware that the politics shaping European states is generally fuelled by conflict. A complete absence of conflict would hardly be desirable in that sense. What is crucial is the way in which such conflicts are resolved.

At the ENRS, we are deeply convinced that dialogue is indispensable to solving these challenges. In our case, that is dialogue about history, although I can easily imagine dialogue on other matters too. For as long as possible – as long as funds permit and people remain willing to participate in our initiatives – we and our successors will continue our work.

Dialogue is inscribed in the DNA of the ENRS. Yet increasingly, different groups seal themselves in their own information bubbles, refusing to talk to each other and restricting communication to their own circles. In such conditions, it is difficult to establish a varied forum for understanding. Can we halt this trend?

RR: That is something of an oversimplification, and I am not fully convinced it accurately describes our situation. I think what we see today, in Europe and in the United States, is part of the social discourse. There is nothing inherently wrong with it so long as we have democratic elections, which make it possible to change the government, and democratic institutions recognised by all sides of the social debate, including judicial bodies that can adjudicate disputes. As long as these elements exist, we need not be overly concerned. The only difficulty might be that, for the next four years, we might be governed by someone whose views differ from ours, yet many fundamental aspects will remain shared.

I do not view our surrounding reality with excessive pessimism, because I see significant distinctions in how Western states behave now, compared with what we witnessed in the first half of the 20th century. Western countries have united in their support for Ukraine's struggle against Russia, which aspires to reassert its former imperial sway. In that, I discern some lessons learned from history. Despite all the imperfections and the laborious decision-making process on sanctions or military support, these actions are indeed taking place. Almost from the start of Russia's 2022 aggression, the West has spoken with one voice against it, firmly backing the Ukrainian people and Ukraine itself. Simultaneously, some channels of dialogue remain open, which is not necessarily a mistake; isolation is one possible course of action for a time, but, eventually, discussion must also have a place. Whether we like it or not, that is how things have generally worked throughout history: conflicts rarely conclude without dialogue.

Hence I feel that, in our present circumstances, the existence of institutions such as ours – which encourage international conversation and supportive interaction between younger and older generations across Europe – matters more than ever. Participants in our projects include not only present-day politicians and social activists but also future politicians, activists and decision-makers. I am convinced that involvement in our ventures helps shape them, their lives, their ethical and moral compass and their future decisions. Thus, I am broadly optimistic on this front.

Expanding the network hinges on establishing partnerships. Who is joining us and has the profile of potential partners changed over the years?

RR: Network members are countries. The process by which a state becomes part of such a structure is far more complicated and time-consuming than if we were affiliating institutions. Aware of this, we did not expect a swift surge in the number of member states. We knew that before countries were willing to join and co-fund the network, we had to demonstrate we had something valuable to offer – that it was worth being part of the ENRS. Hence, we concentrated on implementing projects. At the same time, we continuously encouraged the Czech Republic,

which had been involved in the discussions from the start, to become a full member. As we speak, I can say with satisfaction that the Czechs are in the process of becoming full members on 19 May 2025 in Prague. I am hoping Austria, which long maintained it would join the day after the Czech Republic did, will follow suit. So there is a chance that 2025 will be yet another year of growth.

Increasing the number of member states was never our foremost priority because we carry on regardless, wherever we consider it worthwhile and wherever partners welcome cooperation – or wherever we can invite them to collaborate. Membership in the network is not a prerequisite for working with us on projects. Of course, having more members means dealing with a larger group; but in this sense, we are one of the rare institutions whose very existence is a positive. Indeed, the fact that the members of our governing bodies convene once a year, and the Steering Committee members meet several times a year to jointly decide and discuss matters, already carries value. Then, if you add the various projects we implement, the outcome is quite favourable.

By contrast, the partner institutions you mentioned are not network members but specific bodies that collaborate with us to create projects. One must remember that the institutional landscape in many European countries is naturally changing. Museums have developed beyond simply mounting exhibitions; they have become dynamic institutions delivering educational and scholarly initiatives. There is a growing engagement with centres dedicated to 20th-century history. We work with institutions that address history in myriad ways: academic institutions, organisations focused on popularising historical knowledge and some influential think tanks that examine contemporary reality (including its historical dimensions). These are spaces where intellectuals, academics and analysts prepare materials that can ultimately inform decisions by their governments. We also have our own academic division.

What challenges face history education at present?

RR: There is one factor we have not yet discussed that significantly affects our activities: the advance of communication technologies. The founding of the network was partly a response to the issue of disinformation. When we began, having a website was obviously crucial. Then we saw the rise of various social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. All of these developments remain both opportunities and challenges for education, including history education. The question is how to use our communicative resources wisely, so as to enrich people and equip them to engage with reality and make decisions, including political ones. I have deliberately not limited this to young people, because we learn throughout our lives.

Hence, another area for us to explore is educational programmes not just aimed at sixth-form pupils or university students but also at older adults, as people need and want to continue learning. So on the one hand, we have a chance to utilise communication resources more intelligently, along with a society increasingly open to history, with a desire to learn and engage in dialogue. On the other hand, our challenge is how, in a world saturated with so much information, we can help people choose what is truly important for them. How do we craft our message so that what we want to say is also what others are willing to hear? We want participants in our projects to understand reality more deeply and

Over the past 20 years, the network has completed more than 250 projects in various countries, in collaboration with over 500 partner institutions. Photo from the European Remembrance Symposium in Tallinn, Estonia, 2021.

We collaborate with institutions that engage with history in diverse ways – from universities and international organisations to public history initiatives and influential think tanks exploring the historical roots of today's challenges. Photo from the commemoration of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January 2025 at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France.

make better-informed decisions. Our mission is primarily to support them in acquiring knowledge. We are just one component of an overarching educational process, which includes families, schools, universities, cultural institutions and the media. We need to carve out our niche in that space and fill it with thoughtful, resonant initiatives.

What are the immediate challenges and aims for the ENRS?

RR: After welcoming the Czech Republic fully on board, the short-term objective is to bring Austria, Lithuania and maybe other countries fully on board too.

A major challenge will be dealing with more recent history, namely events linked to the war in Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the impact these developments will have on the narrative of 20th-century history. Whether we wish it or not, they will shape that narrative. Paradoxically, Russia's brutal behaviour in invading Ukraine has given the West an opportunity to recognise that we are dealing with a continuation of certain policies that many had previously pretended not to see, hoping that democratisation would progress. The West overlooked, for example, the fact that the Soviet Union, together with Nazi Germany, unleashed the Second World War and divided Central Europe between them; that it was not only Germany that invaded Poland, but also the Soviets. This perspective on the Second World War and its outcomes were almost absent both in communist Poland and in Western discourse. Now, however, this war offers a chance to refresh the narrative about the history of the Second World War and its consequences, as well as about the collapse of the Soviet Empire compared to developments in Russia. Confronting these interpretations of the past – these varied narratives, new scholarly investigations and newly emerging perspectives – is undoubtedly challenging, but also a remarkable opportunity for Europe and the world.

Events in Israel will likewise affect how we narrate that country's past and the history of the Jewish people, including the Holocaust. The horrific significance of the Holocaust will in no way be diminished, yet discussing it and drawing lessons from it may prove more difficult than before this latest stage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This difficulty will confront everyone – Israeli and Jewish institutions worldwide, as well as any organisation that deals with history, whether through research or through popular education. But every predicament we face can also serve as a chance for deeper mutual understanding. We will see how we make use of it.

The Myth of a 'Second Thirty Years' War'

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The two leaders who coined the term 'the Second Thirty Years' War' in the 1940s were Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle. The term had autobiographical as well as historical resonance. In their own eyes, both men had won both world wars. They stood for the armies and nations victorious in 1918 and 1945. While neither had achieved victory alone, both were towering symbols of national pride and defiance. They had brought Germany to its knees not once but twice.

Neither man ever suffered from a paucity of self-esteem. As early as 1906, Churchill said in a letter to Violet Bonham Carter, daughter of British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, that he recognised that we humans are frail creatures. 'We are all worms', he affirmed, 'but I do believe that I am a glow worm.' Charles de Gaulle was more austere than Churchill, but he was charged with the same sense of destiny as Churchill felt in having led his country from defeat to victory in the Second World War.

There is justice in their pride in victory. Both commanding and imperious figures, they were a caricaturist's dream – the rotund man with the cigar no less than the tall general with a prominent nose projecting from his *kepi*. Both stood alone in the Second World War. Churchill mobilised the English language when a German invasion of England and British defeat looked inevitable in May and June 1940. De Gaulle mobilised French pride, the French language and France's imperial resources when there was nothing else left to bolster hope in the future.

Both fought an imperial war to restore the grandeur of their nations. And yet destroying the imperial dreams of Germany in the Great War and of Germany, Italy and Japan in the Second World War was so costly as to constitute a double Pyrrhic victory for both France and Britain. Both Churchill and de Gaulle came to know, slowly but surely, that the price of victory in Europe was the liquidation of their beloved empires themselves.

Recognition of that tragic reality took time. In the mid-1940s, when de Gaulle and Churchill coined the term 'the Second Thirty Years' War', they were still measuring and basking in the glow of victory. Defeating Germany in 1914–18 and 1939–45 gave Britain and France a commanding position in north-western Europe and on the global stage. And yet that moment of mastery was evanescent, since it would last only as long as the United States paid for it. The Marshall Plan restored European economic stability and helped fuel *les trentes glorieuses*, the massive surge of growth and development that provided the West with the economic strength needed to deflect and then to defeat Soviet power. The reason Europe reconstructed itself as a loose federation of states was that it was no longer able to use their empires as an arsenal and a refuge. American power dwarfed European power in the aftermath of the two world wars.

That is why the story of a second Thirty Years' War was so comforting to them and their supporters. In effect Churchill and de Gaulle projected their own lives and political careers onto the history of their nations and their empires. And while there was more than an element of truth in their doing so, there was also an even greater element of distortion, one that has made it difficult for contemporaries and historians to distinguish between global conflicts that took on entirely different forms and had entirely different consequences.

The argument of this essay is that the differences between the two world wars overwhelmingly outweigh their similarities. What Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, called the biographical illusion – that we see our lives as one continuous narrative that we can narrate ourselves – becomes even more of a distorting mirror when it enters into the self-fashioning of autobiography.[1] For de Gaulle and Churchill, as much as for the societies they led, there never was a seamless web binding together the history of the two world wars into one thirty-year conflict.

The claim

Let us consider three classic statements of the notion that there was in the 20th century a second Thirty Years' War. On his return from Yalta in January 1945, Winston Churchill told the House of Commons:

I have lived through the whole story since 1911 when I was sent to the Admiralty to prepare the Fleet for an impending German war. In its main essentials it seems to me to be one story of a 30 years' war, or more than a 30 years' war, in which British, Russians, Americans and French have struggled to their utmost to resist German aggression at a cost most grievous to all of them, but to none more frightful than to the Russian people, whose country has twice been ravaged over vast areas and whose blood has been poured out in tens of millions of lives in a common cause now reaching final accomplishment. There is a second reason which appeals to me apart from this sense of continuity which I personally feel. But for the prodigious exertions and sacrifices of Russia, Poland was doomed to utter destruction at the hands of the Germans. Not only Poland as a State and as a nation, but the Poles as a race were doomed by Hitler to be destroyed or reduced to a servile station. Three and a half million Polish Jews are said to have been actually slaughtered. It is certain that enormous numbers have perished in one of the most horrifying acts of cruelty, probably the most horrifying act of cruelty, which has ever darkened the passage of man on the earth. When the Germans had clearly avowed their intention of making the Poles a subject and lower grade race under the Herrenvolk, suddenly, by a superb effort of military force and skill, the Russian Armies, in little more than three weeks, since in fact we spoke on these matters here, have advanced from the Vistula to the Oder, driving the Germans in ruin before them and freeing the whole of Poland from the awful cruelty and oppression under which the Poles were writhing.[2]

Three years later, after having won the war and lost the election to remain Prime Minister of Britain in 1945, Churchill used the term the 'Thiry Years' War' in a more peaceable setting. For a brief period he was one of the strongest advocates of a united Europe, to serve as a bulwark against the communist menace in the east of Europe. At the Congress of Europe convened in The Hague in 1948, 100 years after the 'springtime of peoples' of 1848, he told the assembled delegates:

I have the feeling that after the second Thirty Years' War, for that is what it is, through which we have just passed, mankind needs and seeks a period of rest. After all, how little it is that the millions of homes in Europe represented here today are asking. What is it that all these wage-earners, skilled artisans, soldiers and tillers of the soil require, deserve, and may be led to demand? Is it not a fair chance to make a home, to reap the fruits of their toil, to cherish their wives, to bring up their children in a decent manner and to dwell in peace and safety, without fear or bullying or monstrous burdens or exploitations, however this may be imposed upon them? That is their heart's desire. That is what we mean to win for them.[3]

1 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Biographical Illusion', in Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders, with the assistance of Gregor Schima (eds), *Biography in Theory* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 201–16.

2 https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/68a6136f-a7cf-40cf-9765-af120da30526/publishable_en.pdf. Accessed 26 November 2024.

3 https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/58118da1-af22-48c0-bc88-93cda974f42c/publishable_en.pdf. Accessed 26 November 2024.

Here is the germ of the idea that the second Thirty Years' War was the beginning of what Eric Hobsbawm termed the 'short twentieth century'.[4] The two world wars, he claimed, seamlessly led to the Cold War, which came to an end in 1989, 30 years after Churchill's death.

Charles de Gaulle shared Churchill's fondness for the resonance of the term the second Thirty Years' War. On 28 July 1946 at Bar le Duc, not far from Verdun, where he was taken as a prisoner of war in 1916, de Gaulle observed:

The drama of the Thirty Years' War, which we have just won, has involved many twists and turns and seen many actors come and go. We French are among those who always remained on the stage and never changed sides. Circumstances have forced us to vary our tactics, sometimes in the broad daylight of the battlefields, sometimes in the night of secrecy. But we ultimately have only one kind of veteran. Those of ours who, in the past, attacked on the Marne, on the Yser or on the Vardar, were no different from those who, yesterday, clung to the Somme, fought hard at Bir-Hakeim, took Rome, defended the Vercors or liberated Alsace. The painful victims of the martyred villages of the Saulx valley fell for the same cause as the glorious soldiers buried at Douaumont. What would have been the character and outcome of this war if, from the first to the last day, it had not been French as well as worldwide? What would peace be tomorrow if it were not to be the peace of France as well as that of others?[5]

It is striking that de Gaulle used the French Catholic terminology of 'martyrdom' to describe the victims of the two world wars, while Churchill's Protestant English rhetoric was rotund but secular. The British political and social world had given up the concept of 'martyrdom' after the civil wars of the 17th century, while both revolutionary and religious traditions in Republican France lived on in the rhetoric of the martyr.[6]

An alternative interpretation

In these speeches lie the origins of an interpretation of 20th-century history that has attracted many followers. And yet it is my belief that there are many reasons to reject it. Let us consider some of them.

4 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

5 https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/textes/degaulle28071946.htm. Accessed 26 November 2024.

6 Jay Winter, *War beyond Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), ch. 5.

Hitler and the transformation of war

The first reason is that fusing together the two world wars understates unacceptably the role that Adolph Hitler and his circle played in transforming the rules of engagement of military life in such a way as to turn war from being an instrument of policy into war as being an instrument of extermination.

There is little doubt that the German army in 1914 not only engaged in war crimes, but also that such criminal behaviour was observed and accepted as part of the operational necessity of reaching the French capital in precisely 42 days. Perhaps 6,000 Belgian civilians were shot, and most of them presented not the slightest threat to German troops. Many incidents grew out of the fear that Belgian civilians would replicate the behaviour of *Francs Tireurs*, or partisans, who had shot at Prussian soldiers in the war of 1870. Fantasy replaced reason in an overheated atmosphere of the invasion of Belgium by one million German troops, not to conquer the country but to reach the French capital and defeat France in precisely six weeks' time.[7]

This set of incidents was denied by the German army and the German press at the time, derided as hysterical Allied propaganda. Furthermore, the Weimar Republic that replaced the Kaiserreich responsible for these crimes engaged in a systematic effort to disprove the accusations that German soldiers were war criminals. All this was in the context of the forced signature of the new German government that replaced the Kaiser in the peace treaty at Paris on 28 June 1919. Article 231 of that treaty insisted that Germany and only Germany was responsible for all the death, damage and suffering occasioned by the war. All political parties in post-1918 Germany rejected this accusation, as have historians investigating war origins a century later. The sting of the indictment of a whole nation was felt long after the Armistice, and the campaign to exculpate the German army for crimes committed in 1914 makes perfect sense in this context.

Now let us take a breath and turn to the German army in 1941. After the invasion of the Soviet Union, the work of the *Einzatzgruppen,* or mobile killing groups, began within 24 hours. They worked behind the lines of the German infantry, and were formally part of the security police. The German army while moving forward into the Soviet Union provided cover for the massacre of between 1.5 million and 2 million people.

The German army in the Second World War bore very little resemblance to the German army of the First World War. The *Einzatzgruppen* were positive proof of the revolution in military criminality, responsibility for which lay entirely in the hands of Hitler and his circle. They started killing civilians behind the lines in Poland in 1939 and repeated these crimes wherever and whenever the German army moved into and occupied enemy territory. The 3,000 men

7 John Horne and Alan Kramer, *Germany Atrocities in 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

who staffed the *Eingzatzgruppen* were divided into four sections. In every case they were joined in killing civilians by men of the Waffen-SS, the German army, allied troops and local collaborators, who helped identify the civilians to be shot. Over two days in September 1941, 33,000 Jews were murdered at Babi Yar near Kyiv. Estimates vary, but between 0.5 million and 1 million civilians were killed in this way and by these units, perpetrators of what is now known as the 'Holocaust by bullets'.[8]

The German army in the Second World War bore very little resemblance to the German army of the First World War. The *Einzatzgruppen* were positive proof of the revolution in military criminality, responsibility for which lay entirely in the hands of Hitler and his circle.

Most historians separate the history of the two world wars because of the criminal degeneration of the German army from the very outset of the Second World War, first in Poland, and then throughout the Soviet Union. One historian, Daniel Goldhagen, dissented, and presented his case within the context of a second Thirty Years' War.[9] Goldhagen believed that the German people were 'willing executioners' of Jews, heavily concentrated in Poland and the Soviet Union. The perpetrators emerged from a culture of what he termed 'eliminationist antisemitism'. This prejudice was the glue that held the German nation together, and had been distilled over centuries of antisemitic thoughts, words and deeds.

In the First World War, the German army had launched a 'Jew Census' to show that the proportion of Jews at the front, willing to bleed and die for Germany, was much less than the proportion of Jews in Germany as a whole. When the census takers found out that the opposite was the case, and that there was a higher proportion of Jews in the army than in the nation, the census was halted abruptly and the documentation it had put together was destroyed.[10]

The path from burning documents in one war to burning bodies in the following war was long and crooked. The world economic crisis of 1929–32 enabled the Nazi party to emerge as a mass party with mass electoral support. This is why Hitler came to power, not because of the First World War, but because of the very different war he and his party launched in its aftermath. The very radicalism of German antisemitism under the Nazis is the first reason to reject the argument that there was one Thirty Years' War between 1914 and 1945.

8 Patrick Desbois, *La Shoah par balles: la mort en plein jour* (Paris: Plon, 2019); Ronald Headland, *Messages of Murder: A Study of the Reports of the Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police and the Security Service, 1941–1943* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992); Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Knopf, 2002); Jürgen Matthäus, Jochen Böhler and Klaus-Michael Mallmann, *War, Pacification, and Mass Murder, 1939: The Einsatzgruppen in Poland* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2010).

9 Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York, NY: Alfred Knopf, 1996).

10 Jay Winter, 'Antisemitism in the First World War', in Steven Katz (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Antisemitism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), vol. 1, ch. 1.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the transformation of war

The second major reason to reject the claim that there was a Thirty Years' War in the first half of the 20th century is that it was not 1914 but 1917 that created the crisis out of which the later upheavals of the 20th century emerged. When war broke out in 1914, Lenin was convinced that the revolution had to be postponed for a generation. In France, there was a list of socialist militants who would be arrested on the outbreak of war, to prevent them from interfering with military mobilisation. Not a single name on that list – the famous *Carnet B* – was arrested, since they had all joined up. They chose nation over revolution.[11]

Three years later, the Bolsheviks took Russia out of the war. This decision was a massive boost to Germany and her allies, translated into an imperial peace at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918. Reluctantly Russia's new leaders gave Germany informal though clear control over much of European Russia. The aim was clear. Russia would be exploited like a colony.

What followed though was anything but peace. The civil war in Russia between 1918 and 1921, and massive violence after 1918 in a great swathe extending from Finland to Turkey, are the real sources of the transforming of war into the massacre of civilians. I call this phenomenon the 'civilianisation of war'.

The civilianisation of war

It began before 1914 in every single European colonial project. Massacre followed a revolt of the Herero and the Nama people in south-west Africa in 1904. What happened in Belgium in 1914 at the hands of invading German troops pales into relative insignificance when compared to the atrocities perpetrated by King Leopold in the Congo, initially his private fiefdom, later a Belgian colony.

What separated the First World War from the period following is that the 1914–18 conflict was a three-part struggle for dominance over north-western Europe. Churchill and de Gaulle combined into one massive effort Anglo-French resistance to a German-dominated continent, and they won it. That interpretation was only partially true, since from the start both Britain and France were defending their imperial holdings from German penetration or outright takeover. The second Thirty Years' War was always about Europe, but the two world wars were at the same time always about empire.

Western intervention in the Russian Revolution

These two perspectives – the Western European and the imperial – left out Eastern Europe. That omission was obvious in the way the peace conference

11 Jean-Jacques Becker, *Le Carnet B* (Paris: PUF, 1964).

proceeded. On the day in early 1919 President Woodrow Wilson had to start his journey back to Washington to give the state of the union address, he was asked by Winston Churchill if the delegates might spend a bit of time talking about Russia. Wilson paused while preparing to leave, and said yes, they could have a preliminary discussion. Churchill then developed his idea for a military intervention in Russia to overthrow the Bolshevik regime. Wilson said that was not what he had in mind. The conference agreed to further deliberations, and through that crack in the diplomatic wall Churchill forged a ten-nation invasion of Russia.

The problem with this half-hearted intervention in Russia was that it was always too small to make a difference. The Allies did not commit the manpower needed to overthrow Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky. The reason was that domestic opinion in the Allied camp had had enough of war. It was true that a very large population of investors had lost their shirts in Russia; roughly one-quarter of the French portfolio of overseas investments was in Russian bonds. But the rest of the population was more interested in restarting their peacetime lives than in going to war for lost investments. Allied intervention in Russia – like Allied backing for the Greek army in Anatolia – was doomed from the start.

One way to put it is to say that Eastern Europe and Russia were of tertiary importance to Britain and France. First came breaking the German army and scuttling the German navy. Then came shoring up the British and French empires. What happened in Russia mattered, but only after the other two strategic objectives were realised.

Churchill put it disarmingly well when he described the period before and after 1918 in these terms: 'The war of the giants has ended; the quarrel of the pygmies has begun.'[12] I have no knowledge of contemptuous and racist sentiment of this kind by de Gaulle, but France's *mission civilisatrise* was shot through with racial and cultural condescension towards men and women of colour. De Gaulle seemed to be immune from the common prejudices of his military cohort, and fought from and for the French empire when the Third Republic collapsed in 1940.

Whatever their prejudices, Churchill and de Gaulle simply did not understand the appeal of communism to Russian peasants after the war. They had no idea that Western military intervention to overthrow the Bolsheviks was bound to produce just the opposite of what they hoped it would achieve. Churchill hated communism with a passion. He was right about the bloodthirsty ruthlessness of Lenin and Trotsky, but wrong about how the Russian people would react to the presence of ten Western armies on their soil. What peasants saw were men intending to return the old order of power, and that meant their losing the land the peasantry had just seized. In 1919 or 1920, it mattered not one iota that a communist government that gave land to the people would take it back some day; what mattered was that Western intervention in the Russian civil war was a godsend to the Bolsheviks.

The French and British military leaders who had won the war on the Western front could not conjure up a victory with the forces and material they had at their disposal. Ferdinand Foch and Louis Franchet d'Espèrey wanted 20 divisions; they got a small fraction of what they demanded. British commander Sir Henry Rawlinson, Field Marshal Douglas Haig's second in command on the Somme, fared no better. What they could not see was that their political masters could not avoid what the public in every major country clamoured for: demobilisation and a return to peace after the bloodletting of the previous six years.

Thus, the second major reason for casting doubt on the argument that there was a Thirty Years' War in the first half of the 20th century is that it conflates a war that began before the Russian Revolutions of 1917 with wars that were the product of counter-revolutionary efforts beginning in the 1920s and culminating in the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The First World War of the great imperial powers ended with the defeat of Germany and the Central Powers first in 1918, when Germany accepted defeat, and then in 1923 when post-imperial Turkey declared victory in her war against Greece and her allied backers. Turkey in effect rewrote the terms of the peace treaty forced down the throat of the last Sultan of the Ottoman empire. Watching from Munich in 1923, Hitler and his followers in the Nazi party concluded that the peace that had been forced on the Germans in 1919 could be rewritten too, and by force.

Does that link the two world wars? Certainly not, since the conflict of 1914–18 was fought to a bitter end by imperial powers whose vision of the world bore precious little resemblance to the views of either Hitler or Lenin. Both saw war and revolution as symbiotically related. The National Socialist racial revolution, like the Bolshevik Revolution of the working class, was a form of continuous warfare, just as war was a form of continuous revolution. And given the virulence of Nazi ideology, and its biological determinism, war and revolution became a test of racial superiority. Either the German nation would destroy communism (and its putative allies the Jews), or the German nation would perish, and rightly so, since it did not have the stamina to defeat the racial enemy. This form of suicidal logic has nothing in common with the thinking of those who executed the First World War. With Hitler and Lenin, the vision of Carl von Clausewitz that war was politics by other means came to an end. Instead, war became the extermination of a racial enemy imagined as having genocidal intentions on the German race itself.

This mad vision of competing genocides bore no resemblance to reality. But that did not reduce the attractiveness of the idea that the German people had to kill or be killed, and that meant kill not only all communists, but Jews

12 As cited in Peter Gatrell, 'War after the War: Conflicts, 1919–1923', in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), p. 558.

and Poles and other racially inferior peoples who allied with them. Once we see the criminal logic of the Nazi's war in the Soviet Union, it becomes impossible to entertain the idea that there was a Thirty Years' War between 1914 and 1945.

The technology of warfare

The third reason to dissent from the view that there was a Thirty Years' War between 1914 and 1945 is that technological developments in the waging of war radically separate the two world conflicts.

Let us consider air war first. In the 1914–18 conflict, all combatant powers used aeroplanes as the eyes of the artillery. On the Western front, counter-battery operations were an essential part of offensive warfare. This was because the infantry could not move forwards as long as enemy artillery could wreck units advancing into no man's land. Pinpointing artillery dispositions became essential parts of planning infantry movements. Here is where the air forces served an essential purpose.

Once the technology of aircraft production had developed in the 1920s and 1930s, air power became separate from the infantry and an offensive weapon of war in its own right. Had Germany in 1914 had the kind of air power it developed in the 1930s, it could have destroyed the railways that made the defence of Paris possible both in 1914 and again in the last major German offensive of the war in 1918. German air power in 1940 showed the massive difference between the two world wars.

It is true that there were attempts launched by both sides to bombard urban centres in the First World War. Both London and Cologne here hit, and over 1,000 people died in Paris during the German artillery and aerial bombardment of the capital. Technological developments turned aerial warfare against civilian population centres into vital military operations 25 years later. The Blitz was indeed prefigured in the 1914–18 conflict. However, the effect of bombing on civilians was misinterpreted on both sides of the 1939–45 conflict. Both British and German planners believed they could break the back of civilian resistance by bombing urban centres and killing civilians. Both were wrong. It was not only that both combatants had complex plans to diversify and protect essential elements in the munitions sector, but also that the reaction of civilians to intensive bombardment may have hardened their will to carry on.

The limit case of this argument once more separates the two world wars. The use of atomic weapons against Japan – weapons originally developed for use in Germany – brought the Second World War to an end. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki did indeed show what air power could do, but its primary purpose was to save Allied lives, by rendering unnecessary an infantry assault on the Japanese mainland. In the First World War, Germany was defeated without having been invaded. The end of the two world wars separates each of them from any attempt to bind them together in an envelope called the Thirty Years' War of the 20th century.

Another technological development also shows the radical discontinuities between the two world wars. German chemists gave the infantry the possibility of releasing chlorine gas on the Western front during the second battle of Ypres in 1915. Later, phosgene gas and mustard gas were deployed heavily. In 1918 roughly one in every four artillery shell fired on the Western front was a gas shell. Civilians prepared for the release of gas on civilian populations, but that never took place.

In contrast, gas was not used on European battlefields during the Second World War. This was probably because there was little evidence drawn from the 1914–18 conflict that deploying such weapons had operational advantages. After all, if the wind started to blow the wrong way, the attacking forces would wind up poisoning themselves. In contrast, gas was used extensively both in the death camps built by the Nazis to murder Europe's Jewish population and other 'subhumans'.

Japanese troops used gas weapons extensively in China. They also conducted experiments in the use of biological weapons on Chinese and other prisoners of war. Surgeon General Shiro Ishii headed up Unit 731 of the Japanese army, a unit that prepared biological weapons deployed in Manchuria and elsewhere in China.[13]

Once again, there are yawning gaps separating the history of chemical and biological warfare in the two world wars. The best way to put it is to say that the First World War was the antechamber to the Holocaust and to other chemical and biological war crimes. The Great War made mass extermination thinkable, and therefore doable. But the Nazi revolution was necessary before a possibility turned into the crime of the century. Here too we see the need to respect the radical differences between the causes, conduct and consequences of the two world wars.

Conclusion

Some of those who braid together the two conflicts into a unity called the Thirty Years' War of the 20th century have autobiographical reasons for doing so. Churchill and de Gaulle framed their lives in this way.

Others have had ideological reasons for doing so. Historian Ernst Nolte was a supporter of the Thirty Years' War interpretation, since it enabled him to say that the Bolshevik Revolution, a product of the First World War, was the origin and inspiration of the Nazi movement. By that he meant that

13 Yang Yan-Jun and Tam Yue-Him, *Unit 731: Laboratory of the Devil, Auschwitz of the East: Japanese Biological Warfare in China 1933–45* (Stroud: Fonthill Media, 2018).

the murderous history of the first half of the 20th century was a European, or rather German-led, reaction against 'Asiatic barbarism'. Nazi crimes were reactive and defensive, triggered by the communist crimes that preceded them. This is the core of his view that the two world wars were part of a European civil war that came to an end in 1945.

Nolte's revisionist publications set alight what was called the *Historikerstreit* or the quarrel among historians in the 1980s. To Nolte, the Holocaust was not unique, but part of a civil war triggered by the Bolshevik Revolution. The exterminatory war of 1941–5 was waged by Hitler to forestall a communist Holocaust in Germany should the war be lost. Communist crimes and Nazi crimes were bound together as the vicious consequences of civil war.[14]

Other historians refused to accept the theory of a Thirty Years' War as a way of normalising Nazi crimes.[15] The controversy went on for decades, but it faded out primarily because successive German political leaders, from Willy Brandt to Angela Merkel, refused to change their view that Germany remained responsible for the Holocaust, and that there was a bond between the German nation and the Jewish people that must not and could not be broken.

In other parts of Europe, the notion of a second Thirty Years' War has resurfaced from time to time. Horror at the depravity of Stalin and his henchmen led some observers to equate communism and Nazism. Most European historians today (2024) share the moral revulsion but not the historical judgment. Perhaps the most balanced conclusion on which we can all agree is that the two world wars were singular nightmares, each deserving its place in one of the bolgias of Dante's *Inferno*.

14 Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945: Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1987) and Nolte, 'Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will. Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* 6 June 1986.

15 Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum "Historikerstreit"* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1988).

PROJECTS FOR A GENERAL AUDIENCE

After the Great War: A New Europe 1918–1923

Imagine strolling through an outdoor exhibition that transports you to a transformative era in European history – a time when centuries-old empires had disintegrated, nation states had emerged and democracy had began to supplant monarchy. In 2024 *After the Great War: A New Europe 1918–1923* completed its seventh and the last year of touring, offering a compelling visual narrative of one of the 20th century's most decisive turning points. Currently the exhibition can be experienced online.

The aftermath of the First World War was both turbulent and uncertain, yet it proved pivotal in shaping modern Europe. Four major empires had been toppled, leaving space for the formation of several independent national states. Most countries had replaced monarchies with democratic systems. Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation drove social change, and women intensified their campaign for political rights. New trends in the arts and architecture encapsulated the profound shifts occurring across social, political and cultural spheres. These and many other factors contributed to what would later be termed 'New Europe'.

Created by the ENRS in collaboration with experts from over a dozen countries, this outdoor exhibition sought to convey the

The outdoor exhibition 'After the Great War: A New Europe 1918–1923' explores the turbulent post-First World War transformation of East-Central Europe through archival materials, personal stories and striking visual design. Bad Ischl, Austria, 2024.

full complexity of that period. Presenting an array of perspectives – from victors to the defeated, from politicians to ordinary citizens, from individuals to entire communities – the display offered a polyphonic rather than a strictly top-down account, allowing visitors to draw their own conclusions.

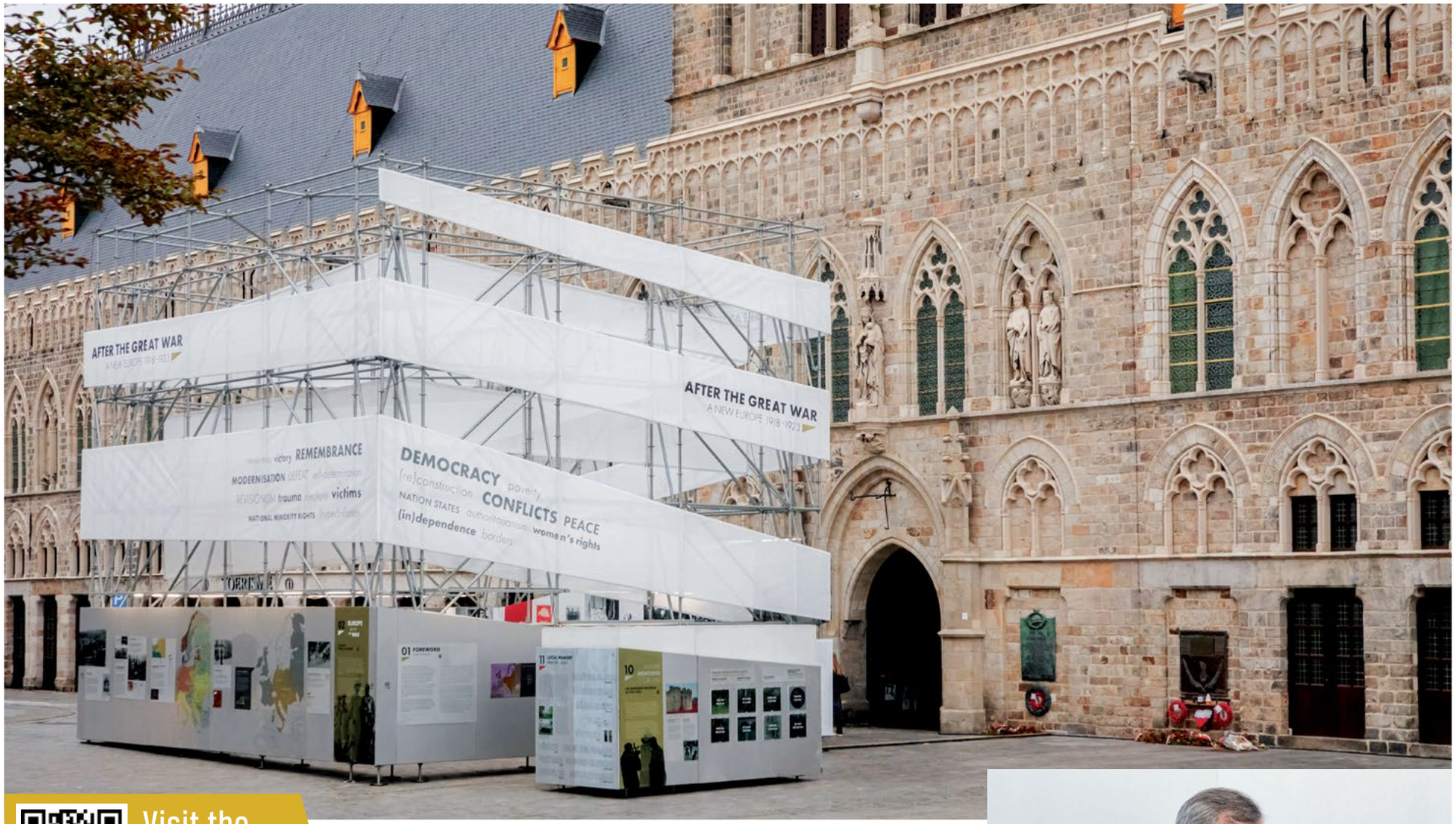
The exhibition's multilayered viewpoints were reflected through an equally diverse range of media. A central historical narrative ran alongside personal testimonies, all illustrated by archival photographs, artwork, graphics and maps. Original films of the time, as well as various interactive features, helped bring the era to life, while free educational leaflets with questions and problems to solve offered visitors further ways to engage.

Launched in autumn 2018, the exhibition toured 27 cities in 15 countries:
Prague, Sarajevo, Bratislava, Verdun, Berlin, Weimar, Wrocław, Kraków, Warsaw, Rijeka, Poznań, Lublin, Vienna, Kaunas, Vilnius, Tallinn, Darmstadt, Dublin, Sibiu, Trieste, Szczecin, Gdańsk, Brussels, Bremen, Strasbourg, Bad Ischl and Ieper.

Wherever it travelled, 'After the Great War' was presented in both English and the local language. Each stop featured a range of accompanying events, from official openings and history debates open to the public to curatorial tours, teacher seminars and student workshops.

To discover more about 'After the Great War', visit the ENRS website, where you can watch a guided video tour by Professor Jay Winter, access dedicated educational brochures and explore podcasts as well as an online version of the exhibition catalogue.

We said farewell to the exhibition in its physical form during its visit to Ieper. However, all materials have been digitised and incorporated into a multilingual online resource devoted to the roots of New Europe. The virtual version of 'After the Great War' was launched in January 2025. Meanwhile, we are working on another exhibition project, dedicated to arts and power in the 20th century.



Visit the online exhibition.

Blending seamlessly into the urban landscape, the exhibition invites residents to reflect on their city's place in European history. Its bold architectural design immediately captures the attention of passers-by. Ieper, Belgium, 2024.

Piotr Gliński, Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage, at the opening of the exhibition in Prague, Czech Republic, 2018.

Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust

The Second World War and the Holocaust forced countless people to endure unimaginable terror and make life-or-death choices. By shedding light on these extreme experiences, this travelling exhibition encourages us to reflect on morality and human behaviour during one of the darkest periods of the 20th century.

Stories of survival and rescue during the Holocaust are among the most powerful and moving in human history, revealing the many sides of both good and evil in human nature. Created in cooperation with the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw and the Silent Heroes Memorial Centre in Berlin, the exhibition contrasts the experiences of those who had to remain in hiding – always fearing discovery – with those who displayed exceptional bravery by offering help, often risking not only their own lives but also the lives of their families. These personal stories are then placed within the broader social and political background of the time, illustrating the specific conditions in various parts of Europe during the war.

In 2024 an Estonian panel was added, featuring Jaagup Alaots and Uku and Eha

Learn more about the exhibition.

'Between Life and Death' tells the stories of Jews rescued during the Holocaust in 13 European countries, highlighting the courage of both survivors and those who risked everything to help them. Strasbourg, France, 2025.

Masing, bringing the number of countries represented to 13: Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. Each section presents two personal testimonies: one from a survivor's perspective and one from a rescuer's, shown against a broader historical background. There is also a panel highlighting diplomats who used their positions to protect those threatened by Nazi persecution.

The exhibition was first revealed at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2018. Since then, it has toured 26 cities in 11 countries, including Amsterdam, Bratislava, Vilnius, Wrocław, Markowa, Bucharest, Budapest, Bern, Dresden, Bełżec, Osaka, Yokohama, Tsuruga, Gifu, Szczecin, Gdańsk, Berlin, Kaunas, Košice, Nitra, Zvolen, Trnava, Tallinn, Považská Bystrica, Senec and Strasbourg.

The exhibition presents powerful personal testimonies from the Holocaust era. Each opening is accompanied by public events and guided tours. Kaunas, Lithuania, 2024.

Echoes of Courage: Exploring Humanity in 'Between Life and Death'

INTERVIEW WITH AGNIESZKA MAZUR-OLCZAK

Deputy Head of the Projects Department at the ENRS, in an interview about the exhibition 'Between Life and Death: Stories of Rescue during the Holocaust'

What is 'Between Life and Death'?

AMO: 'Between Life and Death' is an exhibition that is very contemporary, despite discussing historical events. It tells the story of both the light and the dark sides of humanity, presenting accounts from individuals in various countries who found themselves in extreme situations. This includes those who had to save their own lives and those who, for various reasons, chose to take a risk and help others. What is most important to me is that as we travel the world with this project, I consistently hear that despite the exhibition recounting difficult war stories, it always conveys a sense of hope.

How did it all start?

AMO: In 2017 the European Commission was looking for proposals of an event to celebrate Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January of the following year. At the ENRS, we conceived the idea of creating an exhibition and reached out to the Polin Museum in Warsaw and the Silent Heroes Memorial Centre in Berlin. While developing the concept, we realised that no exhibition had ever presented both perspectives – those of the rescuer and the rescued – and that we could combine them. We believed that, through the European network's partnerships and the vital involvement of the Polin Museum, we could find suitable partners. We sought institutions with interesting documented stories that they were willing to share to promote their collections. We had very little time to prepare this exhibition; it was an intensive three-month effort involving two curators who created the content and a team of academic consultants. Despite the time pressure, everything came together thanks to our contacts and determination.

How did you choose the characters featured in the exhibition?

AMO: The selection process varied by country. We always consulted our national partners regarding the stories we wanted to showcase. The exhibition is structured to display stories from individual countries, and each country has a national partner involved in the work. The authors either searched for characters on the Yad Vashem lists of the Righteous Among Nations or our

partners recommended them based on their manuscripts and artefacts or their knowledge of compelling stories. We also aimed to highlight lesser-known cases, as for instance the Gawrychs family from Poland, or Claus Victor Bock in the Netherlands. It was also crucial that our partners had contact with the witnesses of history, so we could invite them to the exhibition openings.

Did you manage to meet the witnesses of history personally?

AMO: Yes. The first significant meeting was in 2018, during the exhibition's inauguration at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels. Elżbieta Ficowska, Elisabeth Drillich and Jehoshua Shochot, survivors from Poland, France and Lithuania respectively, attended the opening. It was a deeply moving experience for both the witnesses and the audience. Whenever we present the exhibition, we strive to invite a person featured in the exhibition to the opening. I remember Zita Kurz becoming profoundly emotional when she realised someone was interested in her story during the exhibition's debut in Bratislava. These meetings are incredibly poignant, transforming the stories from mere panels with photos into encounters with living individuals. Often, these stories seem destined to end tragically, yet many of these individuals went on to lead significant lives.

Who is this exhibition for? Who visits it, and who would you recommend it to?

AMO: The exhibition attracts a diverse audience, depending on its location, but we always aim to engage young people. 'Between Life and Death' is not just about the past; it is very much about the present. Each country's panel begins by depicting the situation of Jews before the German occupation and how it changed. It illustrates how significant and tragic events can stem from seemingly small, insignificant laws. The lack of societal response – whether due to inability or unwillingness – led to the exclusion, deportation and murder of this group. This is highly relevant today. Young people often say, 'I'm not going to vote because I'm not interested in politics' and this exhibition shows that you may not be interested in politics, but politics is always very much interested in you, and demonstrates that it profoundly affects everyone. This exhibition serves as both a warning and a powerful narrative, showing that even small actions can be crucial for someone's survival. We never know when we might find ourselves in a similar situation.

'Between Life and Death' has already visited many countries, including Japan. You often accompany it. What can you say about its reception in different countries? Have you encountered any surprising reactions from visitors?

AMO: Regardless of the location, I consistently hear two praises. First, visitors often expect an exhibition about humanity's dark side, but they leave feeling hopeful. Secondly, compliments are frequently made about the graphic design studio that collaborated with us. The exhibition's design is not a simple set of boards; it is compact and adaptable to various spaces and always attracts attention. Visitors are naturally curious about their national panels and often learn something new. Young people, in particular, are motivated to explore similar stories and delve into their country's history and its influence on the present.

First unveiled at the European Commission headquarters in Brussels on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2018, the exhibition has since travelled to 26 cities across 11 countries. Tallinn, Estonia, 2024.

Where did the idea for a panel of diplomats, which was included in the exhibition a few years later, come from?

AMO: The idea for a panel dedicated to righteous diplomats originated from our Hungarian colleagues. I became interested in the Yad Vashem list, which is updated annually, and discovered Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese diplomat in Kaunas who helped Jews, including many from Poland. We decided to highlight diplomats as a special professional group with unique opportunities to help. The new panel, showing diplomats from different countries, emerged from this idea. Following its creation, the exhibition's tour to Japan was conceived, but then the pandemic broke out. What seemed a hindrance initially, in fact allowed us to develop the project further. Although 'Between Life and Death' could not travel around Europe, it went to Japan, where exhibitions were permitted. This break enabled us to create additional material, including a film about the diplomats and nine educational packages on the Holocaust available on our 'Hi-story Lesson' platform.

How did the exhibition's reception change, if at all, after Russia's attack on Ukraine? Do you see any differences?

AMO: Yes, there have been changes. This is especially evident at openings, where speakers frequently mention Ukraine's tragedy. Just before the full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, we were preparing to take the exhibition to Dnipro, Lviv and other locations in Ukraine. I recall a conversation with Professor Rydel just days before the war began: he emphasised the need to support Ukrainians by touring the exhibition there. Although these plans are currently on hold, we hope they will be realised soon. We have an excellent Ukrainian panel and a committed Ukrainian partner who helped set it up and participated in the exhibition's 2018 opening in Brussels.

What is your favourite part of the exhibition?

AMO: My favourite part is the section on diplomats, as I was heavily involved in it. It is incredible that an interest in diplomacy and a curiosity in a Japanese person who wanted to help some people should have led to a new narrative for the exhibition. Additionally, for the first time, the exhibition has been translated into the host country's language, because until then, there was only an English version. Nowadays we also have a Slovak version, which is travelling around Slovakia. I hope to see it translated into many more languages to broaden the reach of the tours. The Polish panel is also a favourite, particularly due to the enriching experiences with Elżbieta Ficowska, but I see the entire exhibition as a cohesive whole, and I treat it a bit like my own child.

You must have had numerous adventures during the preparation and journey of the exhibition. Is there any event that particularly stands out?

AMO: I will always remember the first presentation at the European Commission headquarters, which included many high-ranking officials. Just before the event, Marta Cygan, director of Strategy and General Affairs in the European Commission, brought us a poem by Jerzy Ficowski, 'Both Your Mothers', written for Elżbieta Ficowska and translated into several languages. We distributed it to the interpreters at the event. At the end of the ceremony, after each survivor had shared their story, Marta Cygan read the poem. It was incredibly moving, with many leaving the room in tears, especially as the poem's subject, Elżbieta Ficowska, was present among us. At that moment, I realised the exhibition's profound importance and felt that all our efforts were worthwhile. Ever since then, the exhibition has continued to surprise and impact us in many ways.

27 January

International Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed on 27 January, honours all the victims who perished under the Nazi regime. Marking the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau German Nazi Concentration Camp in 1945, this day serves as a powerful reminder of the devastating consequences of antisemitism and racism in any form.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day, observed on 27 January, marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau and invites reflection on the consequences of hatred and indifference. To commemorate the day, the ENRS released two films: *Memento* and *M. Kościelniak: Memories Turned into Art*.

Each year the ENRS commemorates 27 January through a range of initiatives, including social media campaigns, expert-written articles, educational workshops and free resources, such as webinars, brochures and infographics. These materials, designed for teachers and students, are available via the platform *Hi-story Lessons*.

In 2025 the ENRS released a short animated film featuring works by the Polish artist Mieczysław Kościelniak, an Auschwitz inmate who secretly documented the atrocities committed in the camp. His drawings, which denounce Nazi crimes, remain enduring symbols of resistance and the will to survive. The video is available on the ENRS YouTube channel.

'The trauma of the Holocaust still haunts us, whether we like it or not. Generation after generation, we are still connected. To heal ourselves, we must first understand what happened. We must ... remember.'

Watch the film 'Memento'.

Watch the film 'Memories Turned into Art'.

The Genocide of the Sinti and Roma: Why Should We Remember It Today?

PIOTR TROJAŃSKI

PhD, Professor at the University of the National Education Commission, Kraków, Poland

In 2015 the European Parliament declared 2 August as the European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. Since then, commemorations have been organised in many European countries to remember the victims of the brutal persecution and genocide suffered by the Roma and Sinti during the Second World War.[1] Today, on the 80th anniversary of these events, more than ever, we should remember this tragic part of European history, understand its consequences and strive to ensure that its memory does not disappear from our consciousness.

Discrimination, classification and eugenics: a road to genocide

The genocide of the Roma and Sinti was one of the darkest chapters of the Second World War. Like the Jews, they were victims of the brutal persecution of the Nazi regime. Imprisoned in concentration camps and ghettos, murdered in gas chambers and subjected to other methods of extermination, they became victims of the German Nazi genocide whose mark is still felt in the Roma community today.

1 The term 'Roma' (meaning 'man' in the Romani language) was introduced at the first World Roma Congress held in 1971. It covers more than 40 different ethnically related groups of the Roma, some of which, such as the German Sinti, do not identify with the name and emphasise their separate identity. In the past, the Roma used to be called 'Gypsies', which was supposed to reflect their allegedly Egyptian origins. Over time, this word has become pejorative and insulting. Currently, the correct term is the 'Roma' as denoting respect for the identity and dignity of that ethnic group. In this text, the terms 'genocide of the Roma' and 'genocide of the Roma and the Sinti' are used interchangeably as both are applied in source literature and historical debates with reference to crimes committed by the Nazis to various groups that belong to the Roma community. The term 'genocide of the Roma' is used as a general concept embracing all Roma ethnic groups, while the expression 'genocide of the Roma and the Sinti' highlights the diversity and specific experiences of the German Sinti. Romani is used here only to describe the language.

Nazi ideology based on racism and eugenics proclaimed the superiority of the Aryan race over others. Due to their cultural difference, the Roma and Sinti were perceived as an 'inferior race', 'undesirable' and incompatible with the ideal of German society. Because of their nomadic lifestyle, they were described as 'antisocial' and 'criminal', inherently inclined to commit crimes. They were considered a threat to the purity of the Aryan race and the social order. Already from the early 1930s, the Roma and Sinti in Germany were subjected to discrimination and persecution. Their rights were systematically restricted and racial segregation was introduced.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, the treatment towards them became harsher. Many Roma persons were subjected to forced sterilisation. In the acts implementing the Nuremberg Laws, the Roma were deprived of their civil rights just like Jews. They were subjected to preventive police control and sent to 're-education centres'. In 1938, Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and Gestapo, issued a decree bearing the title 'Combating the Gypsy Plague', which stated that the Roma (Gypsies) were a racial and social threat to the German people. The decree ordered the intensification of police and administrative measures against the Sinti and Roma, including their registration, segregation and internment in special camps. This decree formed the basis for mass arrests and internment in existing concentration camps in Germany and Austria, such as Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen, Mittelbau-Dora, Natzweiler-Struthof, Gross-Rosen and Ravensbrück, for example. New internment and transit camps were also successively created for them. Initially, the Roma and Sinti were forced to wear black triangles, classifying them as 'antisocial', or green triangles, denoting 'professional criminals'. Eventually, they were assigned a brown triangle with the letter Z (*Zigeuner*, German for 'Gypsy'). Terrible conditions prevailed in these camps leading to the death of many inmates. Roma prisoners were subjected to pseudo-scientific medical experiments. Conditions in the Berlin-Marzahn, Lackenbach and Salzburg camps were among the worst.

The Roma Holocaust

The first mass persecution took place after the outbreak of the Second World War. On 21 September 1939, Reinhard Heydrich ordered the deportation of 30,000 Roma from Germany and Austria to occupied Poland. In May 1940, some 2,500 Roma were deported to the Lublin District in the General Government (occupied Poland), where they were placed in Jewish ghettos or sent to labour camps. Many of them died as a result of the harsh conditions of forced labour. The rest were most likely later murdered in the gas chambers of Bełżec, Sobibór and Treblinka.

In the autumn of 1941, the German police deported around 5,000 Roma persons from Austria to the Łódź ghetto, where hundreds died from a typhus

epidemic and lack of basic necessities. Those who survived were transported to the camp at Kulmhof (Chełmno nad Nerem) in 1942 and were murdered in mobile gas chambers.

In December 1942, Himmler ordered the deportation to KL Auschwitz[2] of all the Roma and Sinti of the Third Reich. They were sent to Auschwitz II–Birkenau and placed in a special section known as the 'Gypsy camp' (*Zigeunerlager*). The conditions there were conducive to the spread of infectious diseases such as typhus, smallpox and dysentery, which significantly reduced the camp population. In addition, pseudo-scientific medical experiments were carried out on them. At the end of March 1943, about 1,700 Roma brought from the Bialystok region were murdered in the gas chambers of Birkenau, and in May 1944 the camp management decided to liquidate the entire 'Gypsy camp'. SS guards surrounded the camp, but the Roma incarcerated in there, having learned about the SS's plans, armed themselves, resisted and refused to leave. The SS retreated and decided to first transfer about 3,000 Roma to Auschwitz I and other concentration camps. The final operation aimed at liquidating the 'Gypsy camp' took place two months later, on the night of 2–3 August. As a result, some 4,300 Sinti and Roma – mainly the sick, the elderly, women and children – perished in the gas chambers of Birkenau. This mass murder became a symbol of the suffering and heroism of the Roma community, and the date was chosen as International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day. The total number of Roma victims at Auschwitz is estimated to be around 21,000 out of the 23,000 Sinti and Roma deported there.

In German-occupied Europe, the fate of the Roma varied according to local conditions. They were interned, used as forced labourers or killed. *Einsatzgruppen* units and other mobile units killed the Roma in the Baltic States, occupied Poland and the USSR. In occupied Serbia, Roma men were executed *en masse*. In France, the Vichy authorities interned thousands of Roma, and in Romania some 26,000 were deported to Transnistria, where many died of disease and starvation. In Croatia, the Ustaše regime killed almost the entire Roma population, some 25,000 people.

The scale of the crime and the fight for genocide recognition

The exact number of the Sinti and Roma who died during the Second World War remains unknown due to the lack of accurate data on their number living in Europe before the war and the relatively late international recognition of this genocide. It is estimated that before the war the Roma population was between 1 and 1.5 million. Historians estimate that at least 250,000 European Sinti and Roma were killed by the Germans and their allies, although some scholars suggest that the number could be as high as 500,000.

The Nazi genocide destroyed numerous Roma communities, and the Roma suffered psychological and physical trauma, making it difficult to rebuild their cultural and social networks. After the war, however, discrimination against the Roma continued. Throughout Europe, they continued to experience various forms of discrimination, both institutional and of a social nature. These diverse forms of discrimination had a long-lasting impact on the Roma in Europe, perpetuating their marginalisation and social exclusion.

Unlike the genocide of Jews, that of the Roma was not recognised immediately after the war. The courts in West Germany, for example, ruled that actions taken against the Roma before 1943 were legal, which closed the way to compensation for the thousands of victims who were imprisoned, forcibly sterilised and deported. Police harassment and discrimination continued and the post-war authorities seized the Nazi regime's files. It was not until 1965 that German law recognised that acts of persecution prior to 1943 were racially motivated, allowing Roma to claim compensation. However, many of those able to do so had already died. It was only in March 1982 that the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt officially recognised the German Sinti and Roma as victims of genocide.

'Porajmos', Holocaust and 'Samudaripen'

Today there are many terms used to describe the extermination of the Roma. Some of them are the subject of ongoing discussions and debates. This situation demonstrates the different perspectives and approaches to this tragedy not only by researchers and organisations working on the subject, but also by the Roma communities themselves.

The term 'Porajmos', meaning 'devouring' or 'burning', was introduced by the scholar Ian Hancock in the 1990s to describe the Roma genocide. However, its use is controversial, as in some dialects it denotes 'rape', which many Roma find offensive.

Another term is 'Samudaripen', meaning 'total destruction'. Introduced by the linguist and researcher Marcel Courthiade in the 1970s, it is preferred by some Roma communities for being more precise.

The term 'Holocaust' is also sometimes used to describe the extermination of the Roma and Sinti, but can be considered controversial as it is commonly associated with the extermination of Jews. The use of the same term for different groups of victims can lead to confusion and be seen as blurring the specificity of each group's experience.

2 The KL (i.e. Concentration Camp) Auschwitz was a German Nazi concentration and death camp complex operating in occupied Poland, near Oświęcim, between 1940 and 1945. It consisted of three main parts: Auschwitz I (mother camp), Auschwitz II–Birkenau (death camp) and Auschwitz III–Monowitz (labour camp). Auschwitz has become a symbol of the Holocaust, where some 1.1 million people, mainly Jews but also Poles, Roma and prisoners of other nationalities, were murdered under brutal conditions.

Other terms used by Roma communities include: 'Kali Traš' (Black Fear) and 'Berša Bibahtale' (Unhappy Years). The diversity of these terms shows the importance of recognising the unique experiences of different Roma groups. Besides, the terminology used by different Roma ethnic groups to describe their genocide is also important from a social and psychological perspective. This is because these names are loaded with emotional and cultural meaning, helping us understand the suffering and trauma of these communities. Hence, the inclusion of these terms in public discourse is important for the recognition and commemoration of this specific form of genocide.

The use of appropriate terms is also important for education and public awareness. It allows for a better understanding and appreciation of the history of the Roma, avoiding oversimplification and confusion between different experiences of genocide.

Why do we want to remember today?

The shadow of the extermination of the Roma, the horrific genocide perpetrated by the German Nazis during the Second World War still hangs over us. Today in Europe, the Roma are still victims of hate crime, violence, persecution, expulsion and racial discrimination. Therefore, the remembrance of this tragedy should not only be a moral obligation to the victims and their families, but also a key element in building a better future. The importance of this remembrance is multidimensional and involves both the Roma community and society as a whole.

The extermination of the Roma left lasting wounds in their community. However, today the memory of this event is becoming part of their identity and cultural heritage. Learning about their history can strengthen the sense of togetherness and belonging within the Roma community, which was cut off from its roots as a result of the genocide.

The Roma 'Holocaust' did not happen in a vacuum. It was the culmination of centuries of discrimination and prejudice deeply rooted in European history. Education on the subject can raise awareness of the mechanisms of exclusion and persecution that marked the fate of the Roma. Such analysis allows for a better understanding of the mechanisms leading to other genocides and crimes against humanity. This knowledge is invaluable in identifying threats and taking preventive action to protect future generations from similar tragedies, as well as counteracting negative phenomena such as racism and xenophobia.

Remembrance-related challenges

Commemorating the annihilation of the Roma and Sinti faces numerous difficulties owing to both historical neglect and current challenges. For many years, the tragedy has been ignored, leading to insufficient public awareness and the victims fading from memory.

One of the main challenges is the lack of sufficient resources and support from state and local authorities. In many countries where the Roma and Sinti were victims of mass atrocities during the war, their commemoration has been marginalised. This has resulted in the absence of monuments, museums and educational programmes to help preserve the memory of this tragedy. In addition, Roma communities often face prejudice and a lack of understanding from the rest of society, which hinders their efforts to acknowledge and commemorate their own history.

The lack of access to sources on the extermination of the Roma and Sinti is another major problem. This history is far less well documented compared to the other genocides of the Second World War. There is a lack of source material, such as biographies, testimonies and documents. In addition, there is a poorly developed written tradition in the Roma community, which further hinders the preservation and transmission of history. The lack of their own media to promote and report on Roma history and the limited international representation of Roma to claim recognition of their suffering during the Second World War are additional barriers to the commemoration process.

Another important challenge is the need to integrate the story of the Roma tragedy into the broader narrative of the Second World War and the Holocaust. Often the history of the Roma and Sinti is treated as marginal, instead of being an integral part of the story of the Nazi genocide. As a result, many people are unaware of the scale and cruelty that affected these communities. To remedy this, museums, educational institutions and school curricula need to integrate the topic of the Roma genocide into their programmes. This will ensure a fuller understanding of the scale and diversity of the Holocaust, which is key to preserving the memory of all its victims.

Good practice and modern initiatives

A number of activities are currently underway to commemorate the Sinti and Roma extermination. These initiatives aim to preserve the memory of the victims, educate the public and combat prejudice.

Monuments, museums and cultural institutions dedicated to the commemoration of the Roma genocide are being established in some European countries. In 1997 the Documentation and Cultural Centre of the German Sinti and Roma[3] opened in Heidelberg as the first institution of its kind in the world. In 2001 a permanent Roma exhibition presenting the theme of the Roma extermination was created at the Auschwitz Museum. In turn, the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism (Nazism) was unveiled in Berlin in 2012.[4]

3 https://dokuzentrum.sintiundroma.de/. Accessed 1 August 2024.

4 https://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en/memorials/memorial-to-the-sinti-and-roma-of-europe-murdered-under-national-socialism/. Accessed 1 August 2024.

It is also important to take care of existing memorials in order to preserve their historical significance. An example of such efforts is the opening of the Memorial to the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti in Bohemia in Lety u Písku in the Czech Republic in May 2024. This museum was established on the site on the grounds of a former concentration camp where more than 1,300 Roma were held between 1942 and 1943, of whom more than 300 died and the rest were deported to extermination camps, mainly Auschwitz. It should be noted that for many years the camp grounds were used by an industrial pig farm, which aroused much controversy and protests from the Roma community. The museum at Lety u Písku was established as a result of long-standing efforts and pressure from both the Roma community and international human rights organisations.

Various institutions and NGOs play a key role in the commemoration of the Roma genocide. International initiatives such as the European Holocaust Memorial Day for the Sinti and Roma[5] have raised public awareness, creating a space for Roma voices to be heard and promoting values of equality and respect. The Central Council of the German Sinti and Roma founded in 1982[6] stages numerous educational events, exhibitions and conferences in Germany and other countries.

International youth initiatives such as the annual 'Dikh he na bister' ('Look and don't forget' in Romani) play an important role in the commemoration process. This visit to Kraków and Auschwitz-Birkenau aims to commemorate the day of liquidation of the 'Gypsy camp', where the remaining 4,300 Roma and Sinti were murdered.[7] The organisation of festivals, concerts and exhibitions dedicated to the history of the Roma and Sinti supports awareness-building among the general public.

The international cooperation of various organisations, mainly the Council of Europe,[8] Office for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OECD/ODIHR),[9] UNESCO[10] and Internation Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)[11] contributes to promoting the remembrance of the Roma and Sinti genocide in Europe. The funding of educational projects and research on Roma history, the development of guidelines and the publication of books and articles are crucial for education and memory preservation.

In the EU Roma strategic framework, adopted in 2020, and in the European Council Recommendation, the European Commission and EU Member States committed themselves to countering antigypsyism. This framework is based on equality, social and economic inclusion and participation. The European Commission has extended the global #ProtectTheFacts campaign[12] to include the plight of the Roma. The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme has prioritised projects on remembrance of the Nazi genocide, education and research on the subject and the fight against denialism.

Contemporary good practice and international initiatives show that the activities aimed at preserving the memory of the extermination of the Roma and Sinti in Europe are on the rise. Through these activities, history can be preserved and a more informed and integrated society can be built. NGOs, Roma communities and international institutions are working together to ensure that the Roma tragedy is not forgotten. Despite the many challenges, these initiatives bring about positive change and raise public awareness of the Roma and Sinti extermination.

5 https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/. Accessed 1 August 2024.

6 https://zentralrat.sintiundroma.de/en/. Accessed 1 August 2024.

7 https://2august.eu/. Accessed 1 August 2024.

8 https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/inclusive-education-for-roma-children/texts-2; https://rm.coe.int/168008b633; https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/roma-history-factsheets. Accessed 1 August 2024.

9 https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/b/135396.pdf. Accessed 1 August 2024.

10 https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/shedding-light-roma-genocide-take-part-protectthefacts-campaign. Accessed 1 August 2024.

11 https://holocaustremembrance.com/what-we-do/our-work/ihra-project-recommendations-teaching-learning-genocide-roma. Accessed 1 August 2024.

12 https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org/. Accessed 1 August 2024.

Remember: August 23

On 23 August, the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarian Regimes, the ENRS conducts its annual 'Remember: August 23' campaign. Proclaimed by the European Parliament on the anniversary of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, this day pays tribute to those who suffered under totalitarian regimes of fascism and communism, which together caused a tragedy affecting nearly 80 million people.

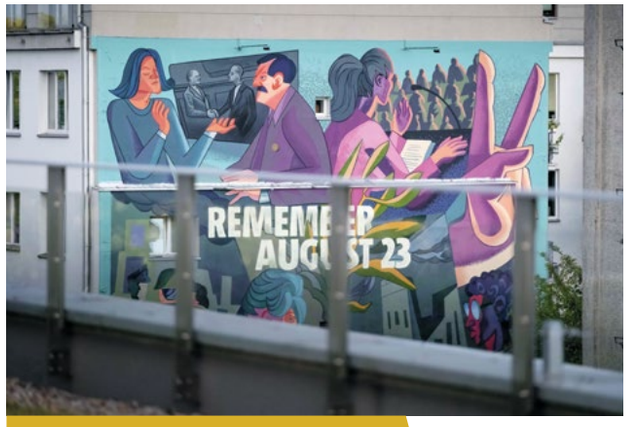
Through a combination of outdoor displays, social media content, videos and articles by leading experts, the campaign recounts individual stories of courage and resistance. By revealing how lives were torn apart, 'Remember: August 23' fosters critical reflection on Europe's past.

The videos available online include the stories of

- Władysław Bartoszewski (Poland)
- Doina Maria Cornea (Romania)
- Milada Horákova (former Czechoslovak Republic)
- Jaan Kross (Estonia)
- Ieva Lase (Latvia)
- Emílie Machálková (former Czechoslovak Republic)
- Péter Mansfeld (Hungary)
- Kazimierz Moczarski (Poland)
- Borys Romanczenko (Ukraine)
- Johann 'Rukeli' Trollmann (Germany)
- Juliana Zarchi (Lithuania)
- Mala ('Mally') Zimetbaum and Edek Galiński (Poland)

Observed on 23 August, the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarian Regimes honours the millions who suffered under Nazi and Soviet terror – a message we continue to share each year through the ENRS awareness campaign 'Remember: August 23'.

On 23 August 2024 a mural by Marcin Czaja was revealed on the wall of a building at 5 Lipowa Street, near the University of Warsaw – a striking interpretation of how the memory of events of 85 years ago continues to resonate across generations and in daily life.



All videos can be found here.

How to commemorate August 23

Have a look at our guide for activity suggestions and explore a range of European sites where visitors can pay tribute to the victims of totalitarian regimes.

Show You Remember

The network marks the day by applying a special frame to Facebook profile photos or wearing a commemorative pin with a black ribbon, distributed in museums and memoria sites.

Add a commemorative Facebook profile frame or ask for a pin with a black ribbon by writing to: **office@enrs.eu**

An outdoor campaign held in Berlin, dedicated to commemorating the victims of totalitarian regimes and raising public awareness of their personal stories and historical significance, 2024.

Download the August 23 remembrance guide.

Why Should We Remember 23 August 1939?

ROGER MOORHOUSE

PhD, Visiting Professor at the College of Europe, Warsaw, Poland

Shortly after midnight, on the night of 23 August 1939, Joseph Stalin drank a toast to Adolf Hitler. The occasion, of course, was the signature of the Nazi–Soviet Pact – or Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact – the non-aggression treaty between Moscow and Berlin which gave a green light to Hitler's aggression against Poland and so paved the way for the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe. It is a date that is seared into the memories of many millions of people in Poland, Finland, Romania and the Baltic States – or those whose origins lie there – yet its significance is still strangely unrecognised in the standard Western narrative of the war.

Our collective ignorance of the subject is surprising. For many of us, the Second World War has a prominence today that seems to grow, rather than diminish, with each passing year. For some countries, it has passed from history into something like a national religion, as evidenced in the groaning bookshop shelves and repetitive television documentaries. In history publishing, it has become commonplace for every campaign of the war, every catastrophe and curiosity to be subjected to endless reinterpretations and reassessment, resulting very often in competing schools of thought and competing historical volumes.

Yet, for all that, the Nazi–Soviet Pact still barely features in the Western narrative; passed over often in a single paragraph, dismissed as an outlier, a dubious anomaly or a footnote to the wider history. Its significance is routinely reduced to the status of the last diplomatic chess move before the outbreak of war, with no mention made of the malign Great Power relationship that it spawned. It is instructive, for example, that few of the recent popular histories of the Second World War published in Britain give the pact any significant attention. It is not considered to warrant a chapter, and usually attracts little more than a paragraph or two and a handful of index references.

When one considers the pact's obvious significance and magnitude, this is little short of astonishing. Under its auspices, Hitler and Stalin – the two most infamous dictators of 20th-century Europe – found common cause in destroying Poland and overturning the Versailles order. Their two regimes, whose later conflict would be the defining clash of the Second World War in Europe, divided Central Europe between them and stood, side by side, for almost a third of the conflict's entire timespan.

Neither was the pact an aberration: a momentary tactical slip. It was followed up by a succession of treaties and agreements, starting with the German–Soviet Border and Friendship Treaty of 28 September 1939, whereby Poland was divided between them and both sides vowed not to tolerate Polish 'agitation' on their territory. Thereafter, across two expansive economic treaties, they traded secrets, blueprints, technology and raw materials, oiling the wheels of each other's war machines. Stalin was no passive or unwilling neutral in this period, he was Adolf Hitler's most significant strategic ally.

For all these reasons, the German–Soviet strategic relationship – born on 23 August 1939 – fully deserves to be an integral part of our collective narrative of the war. But it is not. It is worth speculating for a moment on the myriad reasons for this omission. To some extent, it can be attributed to the traditional myopia that appears to afflict the Anglophone world with regard to Central Europe; the mentality so neatly expressed by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who dismissed Czechoslovakia in 1938, as 'a faraway country', inhabited by 'people of whom we know nothing'. The year 1938 is a long time ago, but to a large extent the sentiment still prevails, in spite of the recent outpouring of support for Ukraine.

The Western narrative of the Second World War traditionally struggles to see past the villainy of Adolf Hitler and his Third Reich; and the centrality of the Holocaust to that narrative only tends to cement that bias.

In addition, there is also what one might call the 'asymmetry of tolerance' in Western political discourse, in which the crimes of communism are more readily wished away or ignored than the crimes of fascism. The logic underlying this is that the excesses of the left were somehow more noble in inspiration – motivated as they supposedly were by spurious notions of 'equality' or 'progress' – than the excesses of the right, which were motivated by base concepts of racial supremacy. This serves, in part, to explain how the so-called 'Overton window' – that is, the spectrum of political policies acceptable to the public – has shifted markedly leftward in recent years, and how Lenin and Che Guevara are still considered 'edgy' on many university campuses.

There is also the problem of historiography. The Western narrative of the Second World War traditionally struggles to see past the villainy of Adolf Hitler and his Third Reich; and the centrality of the Holocaust to that narrative only tends to cement that bias. German historiography, too, is largely predicated upon the 'original sin' of Nazism, relegating all other sinners to the status of, at best, bit-part players. The villainy of Stalin's Soviet Union, therefore, remains largely overlooked: minimised and relativised, a footnote to the Western narrative, rather than a headline.

In such circumstances, Soviet and later Russian propaganda – which has sought to minimise and relativise the pact and its consequences – has been largely pushing at an open door. Nonetheless, the Nazi–Soviet Pact has proved to be something of a touchstone, an obvious embarrassment to the Kremlin, which required more than the usual efforts at obfuscation, diversion and deflection. The first blast in this offensive came shortly after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, in 1941, when Stalin – now desperately courting the Allies – sought to distance himself from the pact by describing it as a last resort, something forced on an unwilling USSR by circumstances. It is perhaps testament to the power of Stalin's 'useful idiots' in the West, that – more than eight decades on – this interpretation is still routinely heard.

In 1948 the Soviet propaganda offensive was ramped up a notch. In response to the publication of the text of the Secret Protocol to the Nazi–Soviet Pact by the US State Department, Stalin himself penned a counterblast entitled *Falsifiers of History* which – of course – declared the Secret Protocol to be a capitalist fake, and criticised Western perfidy for failing to halt Hitler in the first place. He also floated a new interpretation of the pact, seeking to justify it by painting it as a defensive masterstroke – a delaying of the inevitable rather than a cynical collaboration.

Soviet denial of the Secret Protocol – the most incriminating document from the negotiations surrounding the pact – would prove remarkably durable. Towards the end of his life, in 1983, Vyacheslav Molotov was asked by a journalist about the existence of the Secret Protocol. His reply was unequivocal. The rumours about it were designed to damage the USSR, he said: 'There was no Secret Protocol.' Less than a decade later, in the face of widespread popular protests in the Baltic States, Gorbachev would publish the text of the document – signed by Molotov – from the Soviet archive.

In the years that followed, the brief flowering of *Glasnost* – or 'openness' – under Gorbachev and Yeltsin would give way to a new culture of secrecy and dogged denials. Archives, briefly opened to the world's scholars, would be closed to all but the most loyal and dependable commentators. The memory of the Second World War would in time become one of the cornerstones of Putinism; a cult of maudlin manufactured remembrance that would increasingly take the place of the once-promised prosperity and stability.

Under Putin, however, the narrative was not just a retread of the Soviet story of the war; the Nazi–Soviet Pact, for instance, was rebranded as a demonstration of the Kremlin's strength and an implicit warning to Russia's neighbours. When Moscow published a trove of archival documents relating to the pact, in 2019, the underlying message was clear: the same brutal logic

that had motivated the pact – the logic of 'spheres of influence' and of the Darwinian right of the strong to dictate to the weak – was once again enjoying currency in the Kremlin.

In these circumstances – with a disinterested West and a deceitful, revanchist Russia – it is easy to see how any honest assessment of the Nazi–Soviet Pact is very difficult to achieve. Yet, we must honestly assess it, if for no other reason than for the sake of historical integrity and accuracy. The Nazi–Soviet Pact is one of the most significant treaties of the Second World War. We forget the link, perhaps, but the pact led directly to the outbreak of war; isolating Poland between its two malevolent neighbours and scuppering the rather desultory efforts of the Western powers to thwart Hitler.

The Great Power relationship that the pact forged is similarly significant. The war that followed carried its malevolent stamp. Poland was invaded and divided between Moscow and Berlin. Finland, too, was invaded by the Red Army and forced to cede territory. And, with Hitler's connivance, the independent Baltic States were annexed by Stalin, as was the Romanian province of Bessarabia, their brave, dissenting populations doomed to be deported to the horrors of the Gulag. The Nazi–Soviet Pact is no parochial concern therefore, not a subject of purely local significance. At a conservative estimate, it directly impacted the lives of some 50 million people.

So, it is clear then, that the pact is something that needs to be commemorated and needs to be remembered. In the main, it has fallen to those most directly affected to commemorate it. In the late 1980s, Baltic and East European refugees from communism in the West established 'Black Ribbon Day' – on 23 August – as a focus for anti-Soviet protests. Soon after, in 1989, the inhabitants of the Baltic States protested against their annexation by the USSR – facilitated by the Nazi–Soviet Pact – by the mass demonstration of the Baltic Way; a two-million strong human chain that snaked for over 650 kilometres across the three republics on 23 August.

In 2009 such popular initiatives found an official echo with a resolution, presented to the European Parliament in Brussels, proposing that 23 August should henceforth be recognised as the 'European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism'. It was passed with a few votes against from communist MEPs, one of whom described the juxtaposition of the Nazi and Soviet regimes as 'indescribably vulgar'.

Russia, naturally, also cried foul, with then-president Dmitry Medvedev establishing in response the 'Presidential Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History' – a deliberate echo of Stalin's earlier attempt to stifle the truth of the pact. According to the new decree, transgressors could be fined or imprisoned for five years for deviating from the new, strictly laudatory line on the Soviet performance in the Second World War. It was all rather reminiscent of the old Soviet joke: 'the future is certain, it's only the past that is unpredictable'. Now, since 2014, the ENRS has taken up the challenge of commemorating the Nazi–Soviet Pact through its educational campaign, entitled 'Remember: August 23'. Its initiatives, which range from distributing pin badges to the production of short films to highlight the stories of some of the victims of the totalitarian regimes, are intended to disseminate knowledge, free of falsehood and disinformation, and provoke honest discussion.

Some might imagine that, with Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine plunging the European continent once more into war, arguments about the finer points of 20th-century history are somehow a luxury that can be ill-afforded. I would argue the contrary, however. Russia's brutal and unprovoked invasion of its neighbour is merely the latest instalment of a bloody continuum; a new offence in a catalogue of crimes – stretching back to the Nazi–Soviet Pact and beyond – which betray the mindset of suspicion, paranoia and naked aggression that has long guided the Kremlin's world view. Now is the time for the scales, finally, to fall from our eyes; for us to realise – in bloody technicolour – the true vicious nature of Europe's neighbour to the east, and to redouble our efforts in studying and disseminating the darkest chapters of its history. In that endeavour, August 23 can and must play a central, defining role.

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'WWII 80 Years After' Campaign

The 'WWII 80 Years After' campaign commemorates the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, aiming to deepen understanding of its complex causes, significant events and lasting impact on the world. Through a series of thematic monthly explorations, the campaign encourages reflection on pivotal moments in history and their relevance to contemporary society.

Each month focuses on a specific aspect of the Second World War, featuring curated materials such as scholarly articles, historical documents and educational content. The themes cover key events leading to the end of the war and its aftermath, including significant occurrences like the establishment of post-war orders and the impact on societies across Europe. The project is co-financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland.

The 'WWII 80 Years After' campaign encourages reflection on pivotal moments in history and their relevance to contemporary society. Top, from left to right: British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Soviet General Secretary Joseph Stalin during the Yalta Conference in 1945. Bottom: Resistance members captured during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943.

'Grandparents: Grand Stories' – a History Competition

We invite teachers, pupils and university students from across Europe to explore local history related to the Second World War. Entries may be submitted in the following categories:

For Students

- **Written Account** An essay or an interview transcript featuring a family or local story from the Second World War era, including, if possible, a firsthand witness's account of history.
- **Photographic Project** A photograph of a living witness to history, family memorabilia related to the Second World War or a local site of memory.
- **Audiovisual Account** An animation or film that presents a conversation with a historical witness or tells a family or local story connected to the Second World War.

For Teachers

- **Lesson Plan** A comprehensive lesson plan focusing on the Second World War.

Visit an online repository of submitted works.

The End of the War and the Beginning of Contemporary Europe

JAN RYDEL

Professor at the University of the National Education Commission, Kraków, Poland, member of ENRS Steering Committee

The end of the Second World War was, and indeed still is, a prime caesura in the new and recent history of Europe and the world. There are many reasons to recall this turning point, especially as the 80th anniversary of its end approaches in 2025. One of the most pressing reasons is the current fragility of the world order, which took shape during three decades of violent and tragic upheavals – spanning the First and Second World Wars (1914–45) – and is now once again beginning to crumble before our eyes. Seeing this makes us anxiously wonder what the future world order will look like and what will happen before it emerges.

The war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945 with the surrender of Germany and the war in the Far East on 2 September 1945 with that of Japan. The significance of the end of the Second World War varies according to which perspective is taken, geographically, but also socially and politically.

From the point of view of 'ordinary' Europeans living at the time, the dominant feeling was one of relief. Mass deaths had ended, the Holocaust had ceased, the last concentration camps still in the hands of the SS had been liberated, the bombings had stopped and soldiers no longer died at the front. Although it should be mentioned that the last clashes with German troops still took place on 12 May 1945 and the last German unit capitulated on 4 September 1945 on Spitsbergen. For the liberated in Germany, the surviving prisoners, prisoners of war and forced labourers, a new phase of their lives was beginning. Citizens of the countries of the victorious coalition celebrated the end-of-the-war nightmare and victory on city streets, rejoicing in the hope of the return of loved ones who had been scattered by the war and an improvement in their living conditions. Though mostly overwhelmed by the sense of defeat and humiliation, the Germans were also relieved by the end of hostilities. Significantly, the behaviour of the Nazi authorities in the final days

of the war, combining senseless cruelty with cowardice, meant that hardly anyone felt any regret at the fall of the 'Thousand-Year Reich'.

However, when one looks at the end of the war from the perspective of politicians of the time, it is clear that the situation in Europe at the end of the war was far from a simple black-and-white scenario. Winston Churchill was tormented at the time by the vision of an isolated Britain, which alone – in the event of an American withdrawal across the Atlantic – would have to face the threat of Stalin's vast Soviet army, buoyed by its victories, ready to move from the Elbe to conquer Western Europe. It was because of these concerns that Churchill insisted on another summit conference to work out a *modus vivendi* of the powers in post-war Europe and the world. This took place at Potsdam in late July and early August 1945.

Contrary to Churchill's fears, Stalin was aware of the scale of the Soviet Union's losses, destruction and exhaustion, so he did not plan a march of communism for the time being. At the same time, the Soviet dictator demanded the establishment of Moscow's full control over the states that the Soviet army had occupied as a result of the war (and with the acquiescence of the Anglo-American powers expressed at Tehran and Yalta). This led to a brutal crackdown on democratic forces in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. Even in Czechoslovakia, whose democratic authorities had been demonstrating loyalty to Moscow for several years, there was a communist putsch. Thus, at the turn of 1947 and 1948, highly repressive Stalinist communist governments were installed in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as well as in the Soviet occupation zone of Germany. This created a compact political-military bloc with the Soviet Union at the head. Only Yugoslavia, under Marshal Josip Tito, broke away from Moscow's hegemony, but retained its communist system, which over time was considerably liberalised.

In the first months after the end of the war, the United States succumbed to illusions of the possibility of Allied cooperation with the Soviet Union. However, the growing difficulties in that regard and the rise in outbreaks of conflict, such as in Greece, Turkey, Iran, occupied Germany and China, led Washington to change its policy towards the Soviets. It was all the easier for the Americans to make this change as they had a sense of their own power, stemming from their possession, as the only country, of nuclear weapons (the so-called American nuclear monopoly lasted until 1949), which were used in the first days of August 1945 destroying the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Moreover, as a result of the war, the US gained an incredible economic advantage over any potential competitor, consolidated as early as 1944 with the creation of the so-called Bretton Woods system, in which the US dollar was recognised as the world currency and guarantor of the stability and development of the capitalist economy.

Although not intending to start a new war to destroy the power of the Soviets, President Harry Truman decided to put the brakes on the expansion of their influence. This concept, known as the containment doctrine or the Truman Doctrine (1947), contributed to the development of a comprehensive plan to support the post-war economic reconstruction of Western Europe, which was making very slow progress. This was the origin of the European Recovery Program, widely known as the Marshall Plan (1948). A year later, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) was established, a defence alliance of the countries of Western Europe, the USA and Canada, which owed its power above all to the American armed forces and their nuclear arsenal. Thus, just three to four years after the end of the Second World War, a second political-military bloc was created and the world political order took on a bipolar form.

Although the two blocs were hostile to each other, they had comparable military potentials with nuclear arsenals at their core, resulting in mutual deterrence. Their relations were characterised by permanent tension and repeated attempts to weaken the opposing side, including through wars waged on the periphery of both spheres of influence, while avoiding direct confrontation between the superpowers, which could lead to the use of nuclear weapons with fatal consequences for each side. This state of affairs led to what is known as the 'Cold War'. It began soon after the final shots of the Second World War had been fired and ended 40 years later with the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the fall of the Soviet Union (1989–91). The United States became the sole superpower for a time, and the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama could hopefully spin a vision of the 'end of history' – the reign of liberal democracy throughout the world.

While during the Cold War relations between the blocs described here were generally balanced in terms of military power and deterrence, the paths of their internal development went in different directions. Western states became liberal democracies with market economies, building welfare states and consumer societies. The extinction of conflicts between the constituent states became characteristic for Western Europe that initiated a process in which interests were in practice harmonised. These trends developed rather quickly into progressive integration, the key stages of which were the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957, the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy in 1962, the adoption of the Schengen Agreement in 1985 and finally the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which brought the European Union into being.

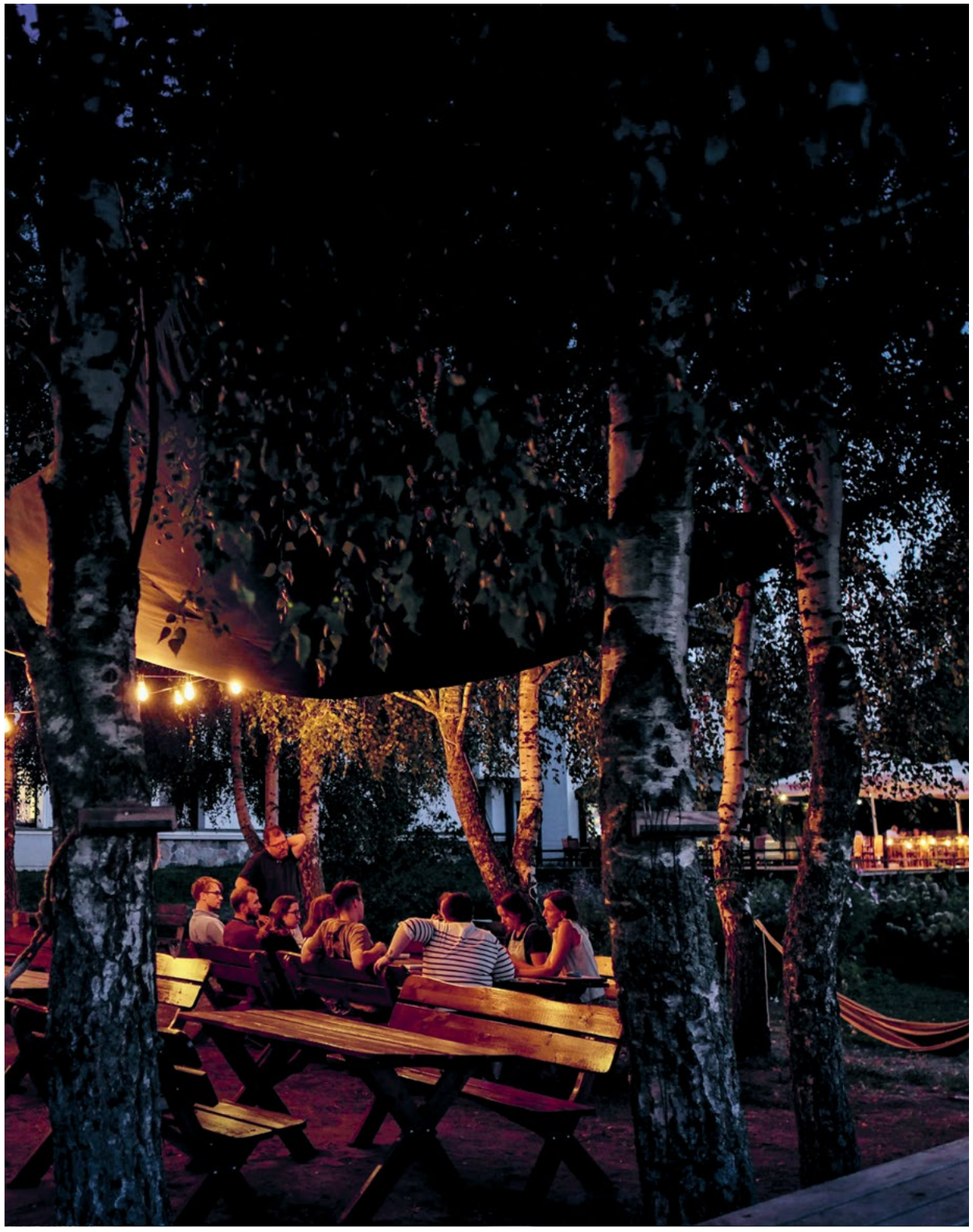
Meanwhile, the development of the countries of the Soviet sphere of influence followed completely different vectors. Indivisible rule was exercised there by communist parties by means of the tight ideological supervision of societies thanks to their almost total control over the circulation of information. Questioning any element of this system of power was met with repression by an extensive and specialised political police apparatus. The economies of these countries were described as planned, or more accurately as 'commanded and controlled'. In the absence of free market competition,

a ‘deficit society’ developed, in which, for example, having a telephone (a landline, of course) was a rare privilege and the quality of goods and the level of services, and also labour productivity, left much to be desired. In the 1970s and 1980s, the planned economies of the communist countries, by nature not very receptive to innovation, definitely lost touch with the advanced technologies of the third industrial revolution. They were unable to keep pace with the West even in the hitherto much-honoured field of arms production. Their failure to win this competition became an indirect cause of the collapse of communist rule and of the Soviet Union.

Another consequence of the Second World War was decolonisation or, as it used to be called, the end of world domination by the white man. In 1947 the British, carrying out their wartime promises, left India and, shortly afterwards, their remaining colonies in Asia (with the exception of Hong Kong). The Japanese, who had pursued their conquests during the war under the slogan ‘Asia for Asians’, rekindled the unstoppable aspirations for independence of the Dutch and French possessions in Asia. At the same time, Arab countries gained real sovereignty and the State of Israel was established in the Middle East. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, almost all African colonies gained independence. The situation in China was peculiar, where in 1949, after eight years of ferocious war with Japan and three years of equally bloody civil war, the Communists took power under Mao Zedong. With this came the eradication of Western influence, and Moscow’s influence also proved relatively short-lived and superficial. However, as a result of the regime’s ideological follies and its adventurous foreign policy, leading to the isolation of the country, China’s enormous potential remained dormant until Mao’s death in 1976. Shortly afterwards, China experienced four decades of rapid economic growth and civilisational progress, with Beijing’s international clout expanding rapidly, thanks to opening up its economy to the world. These results were achieved without depleting the Chinese Communist Party’s monopoly of power using extreme methods to maintain it. Today, in terms of economic and military potential China competes with the United States and, together with Russia, India and many African and Latin American countries, aspires to co-determine the new world order.

When considering the caesura that marked the end of the Second World War in the spring and summer of 1945, it is important to remember the events that preceded this historic turning point: both the massive struggles of the warring parties and the victims of war and genocide committed by the totalitarian regimes of the time, including the unprecedented crime of the Holocaust. The number of victims of the Second World War is estimated at around 60 million people. It is also worth remembering the short-, medium- and long-term consequences of this calamity, which to a large extent shaped the world in which we have lived up until now, and which is only just becoming a thing of the past and undergoing a fundamental transformation.

PROJECTS FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS



Our educational programmes for students aged 15 to 26 combine an interdisciplinary approach with open discussion and creative work. The 2024 ‘In Between’ edition in the Masuria region.

Growing Up with the ENRS

INTERVIEW WITH LUDĚK NĚMEC

Postgraduate, University of Vienna

When I saw your name in the programme of the ‘Genealogies of Memory’, I remembered you from the ‘In Between?’ project. You were the one who published his first history book at the age of 16.

LN: That was a short book about one of the villages in Šumava, now a national park with a gorgeous landscape, where you can just see traces of former houses. The name of the place was Krásná Hora in Czech or Schönberg in German. It was a settlement of about 400 residents before 1946 that no longer exists. I’ve visited it regularly with my parents since I was three. Around age 14 or 15, my passion for history started to grow, and I wanted to know: ‘Who lived here, and why did they leave?’ I couldn’t find answers in any book. So I began my own (admittedly non-academic) research. I collected pictures of the houses and families and interviewed some who’d been expelled to Bavaria. When I realised others were just as curious, I compiled my findings and images into a small book.

That sounds like a beginning of an exciting career …

LN: After finishing secondary school in the Czech Republic, I went to Vienna, where I completed my bachelor’s and master’s degrees in history. I finished the master’s programme last September, and then began a PhD in history at the University of Vienna in October. At the same time, I also started another master’s in archival studies and auxiliary sciences of history.

What are your research interests?

LN: Initially, my academic focus was on the German minority in Czechoslovakia – specifically in southern Bohemia, my home region. This minority was expelled after the Second World War. Their villages, situated along the Czech–German and Czech–Austrian borders, were largely destroyed once the inhabitants were gone. During the communist era, especially with the Iron Curtain, many of these places were further demolished. I began by researching a few such villages, documenting their histories and the stories of the expelled residents, exploring Czech–German relations in the late 19th and 20th

centuries. Later, for my master's, I shifted to the nobility in the Habsburg monarchy, focusing on the late 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. Since I had worked as a tour guide at a castle in the Czech Republic, I became interested in not just the aristocratic families and their lifestyles but also the preservation of their castles. In the 20th century, all castles in the Czech Republic were expropriated – some even before the Second World War, but most afterwards. Today, many are well-preserved, allowing tourists to visit on guided tours, which is somewhat unique to the Czech Republic. My current research examines how these aristocratic castles function as sites of memory.

Which brought you to the ENRS on more than a one occasion …
LN: Yes. Three years ago, while conducting in-depth research on Czech–German relations, I saw a university newsletter about your programme in 2022. It offered a chance to visit Warsaw and then travel to three different regions in Europe to discuss 'in-between' places – areas where diverse ethnic groups once lived before their expulsion in the 20th century due to nationalism and other conflicts. It was a lucky coincidence for me. Later, when I transitioned to studying the nobility, another ENRS programme happened to align with that topic. It seems I've been fortunate that the ENRS focuses on subjects closely related to my work.

What were your impressions of 'In Between?' and 'Genealogies of Memory'? Did they meet your expectations? Did you learn anything new?
LN: They definitely did. It was wonderful to meet people who shared my interests but came from different backgrounds – journalism, sociology and so on. Their unique viewpoints broadened my perspective. This diversity was evident towards the end of 'In Between?', when we had to create a podcast. We sometimes struggled to merge our various approaches, but it was an enriching experience, and I'm still in touch with some of the participants. Three years ago, when I was finishing my bachelor's, 'In Between?' felt like a beginner-level programme, bringing together young people, many of whom were also undergraduates or early master's students. 'Genealogies of Memory', on the other hand, was much more academic, aimed at established scholars. I was probably the youngest person to present a paper, but I met many researchers working on topics that overlap with my PhD. Some had authored articles or books I'd already read, so it was an excellent chance to network, gain new insights and compare approaches – especially regarding noble families in different European countries. I focus primarily on the Czech Republic and Austria as former parts of the Habsburg monarchy, so being able to discuss the Polish, German, Romanian and Albanian nobility in Warsaw was extremely valuable. Overall, it gave me a much broader perspective. My PhD focuses on one influential noble family, the Schwarzenbergs, based in Bohemia, Austria and Germany. It's difficult to conduct a thorough investigation covering multiple large territorial areas by yourself. Often you need a broader team or a conference setting to share knowledge. 'Genealogies of Memory' was the perfect place to learn from scholars studying the nobility in various regions.

The Czech Republic recently expressed its willingness to join our network. What do you think about that?
LN: I was surprised it wasn't already a full member, but I'm glad it is now. The network offers a lot to students, academics and teachers. It's always beneficial to meet people from various countries and discuss both shared and differing perspectives rather than building walls. I fully support the Czech Republic's membership, and I hope more Czech participants get involved in ENRS programmes.

How is memory politics approached in the Czech Republic?
LN: Many topics tie Czech history to other nations – for instance, the Habsburg monarchy, which unites much of Central Europe; our relationship with Slovakia, since we were once a single state; and our relationship with Germany, particularly regarding the German minority expelled after the Second World War. These are issues that really demand international, often multilateral, research and cooperation. I believe that kind of cooperation is already underway at some academic and museum levels, and the European network can certainly facilitate further connections. Under communism, Czech remembrance was more or less frozen for decades, similar to how it was in Slovakia, Poland and other post-communist countries. After 1989 we had to face historical issues that had been suppressed for over 40 years – such as the 'German ghosts', a topic common to Poland and others too. But now, 30 years after the end of the Iron Curtain, I think our remembrance culture and policies have reached a fairly solid European standard. Much of Czech society is ready to engage with less proud parts of our past.

Sound in the Silence: A Journey through History

'Sound in the Silence' offers secondary school students the opportunity to delve deeply into the complex and painful chapters of 20th-century European history through an engaging, hands-on approach.

Each edition of the project is held in a different location, chosen for its historical significance and connection to the turbulent events of the last century. The journey begins with an exploration of an aspect of local history, after which participants channel their understanding into artistic expression. Working alongside professional artists, they create a unique performance that brings the past to life.

While students immerse themselves in the creative process, their teachers and local educators participate in workshops focused on interdisciplinary methods for teaching history, enhancing their educational toolkits.

In 2024, for the first time, the programme focused on crimes committed during a communist regime. This edition was held in Bucharest and the Pitești Prison, with local partners including the Pitești Prison Memorial and the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism (NIST).

During 'Sound in the Silence', participants establish a personal connection to the site they visit and work with professional artists to transform their reflections into an on-site performance.

In 2024 'Sound in the Silence' explored, for the first time, the crimes committed under the communist regime in Romania, taking place at the former Pitești Prison.

Every journey begins with an in-depth study of the historical context. The students spent the first days of the programme in Bucharest, learning about the Ceaușescu era.

Each edition of 'Sound in the Silence' is a powerful confrontation with history and one's own emotions. The programme is based on intensive group work that deepens historical understanding, fosters creativity and builds lasting relationships.

A rehearsal for the final performance at Pitești Prison in Romania.

Discover past editions and tap the interactive map.

In previous years, ‘Sound in the Silence’ has been hosted at historically significant sites such as Neuengamme, Ravensbrück, Borne Sulinowo, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Warsaw, Gdańsk, the Bunker Valentin Memorial in Bremen, the Kaunas 9th Fort Museum, Gusen, the Mauthausen Memorial Sites, the House of the Wannsee Conference and the Jasenovac Memorial Site.

Artistic workshops at Pitești Prison.

Hiding a Festering Wound only Makes the Situation Worse

INTERVIEW WITH MARIA AXINTE

Creator of the Children’s Museum of Communism

KRISTINA TAMELYTĖ

correspondent for LRT.lt

‘Abolishing a museum, in my view, brings little value. What truly matters is fostering dialogue about it and the complex choices people have had to face,’ says Maria Axinte, a Romanian and co-founder of the Children’s Museum of Communism in Romania. When asked about the controversy surrounding the Venclova House Museum in Vilnius, which relates to poets who served the Communist Party, she emphasises the necessity of confronting painful experiences and understanding them, as only through such engagement can the wounds of society begin to heal.

I had the opportunity to speak with Maria in Warsaw during the European Remembrance Symposium, an event organised by the ENRS. This symposium brought together museum professionals, historians and policymakers to explore the concept of freedom and its significance in the modern world.

Maria Axinte came to Warsaw to share her experience of creating the Children’s Museum of Communism in Romania. We talked not only about the origins of this ambitious initiative but also about the methods employed by the museum’s educators to engage children and convey the historical context of Romania’s communist past. Her reflections offered a compelling glimpse into the delicate balance of presenting difficult histories to young audiences while fostering understanding and critical thinking.

You are one of the authors of the Museum of Communism for Children. How did the idea of creating such a museum come about?

MA: I must say that this idea was not part of our initial plan, nor did we foresee bringing it to fruition. I represent the Pitești Prison Memorial Museum, a site located in southern Romania, near Bucharest. This prison operated during the years 1949–51, when Romania was under the rule of the Communist Party. It was a place where both physical and psychological violence were used to ‘re-educate’ young, politically active people who did not share communist views at the time (about 600 young people were imprisoned there – *LRT.lt*). The aim was to convert them to communism. This period stands out as one of the most brutal chapters in both the history of communism and Romania.

The exhibition at the Memorial Museum is not accessible to children, as the emotions, experiences and events it portrays are simply too intense. You have to be at least 12 years old to visit the museum. We believe that by this age, a child is capable of beginning to understand the more complex and painful aspects of the world.

However, while working on the exhibition, we realised that children often came with their parents to our location but because of their age were unable to visit the prison exhibition. We were often asked by the children why they could not see the exhibition.

Our encounter with a Romanian artist who creates illustrations about children in prisons inspired the idea for a new exhibition. However, we couldn't simply focus on repression alone – we needed to provide children with context. What is communism? Why did communists imprison people? Had these individuals done anything wrong?

Together with the previously mentioned artist, we created a graphic novel depicting the imprisonment of children in Romania. This was followed by an exhibition about communism tailored for children. Over time, we realised that we could expand this initiative into a fully fledged museum, where children could gain a deeper understanding of that era and see the world from the perspective of children who lived under communism.

Today, the Children's Museum of Communism comprises four exhibition spaces, and we plan to add two more, as we have recently received additional funding for the project.

What can young visitors discover in your exhibition?

MA: First and foremost, children can learn about the ideological foundations of communism. We discuss figures such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Notably, communism was banned in Romania before 1944, but following the arrival of the Soviet army, all political prisoners were released from jail.

The presence of the Soviet army on Romanian soil naturally facilitated the Communist Party's rise to power. In the 1946 elections, votes were blatantly falsified.

To illustrate this historical manipulation, we've designed an educational exercise for children. During the activity, they're invited to vote on how they would like to conduct their lesson that day: either in a traditional, school-like format or in an interactive way. The voting process is conducted in secret, and once the votes are tallied, we announce that the traditional method has won – regardless of the actual results. Most children are visibly dissatisfied, having voted for the interactive option. At this point, we ask them how they feel about such an outcome. Of course, they're unhappy – they didn't vote for it! Eventually, the activity proceeds in the interactive format they originally chose, but the exercise allows them to experience the injustice of manipulated elections firsthand. We then discuss how people might feel in the face of such falsifications, as happened during Romania's communist era.

The exhibition also introduces children to various methods of repression used under communism, such as collectivisation, nationalisation and political imprisonment. These lessons aim to foster a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of control and their impact on individuals and society.

We strive to emphasise resistance, particularly the fact that children also took part in various forms of resistance against the Soviet regime. For instance, some children also were born into partisan groups in the mountains, while others were born to imprisoned mothers and spent the first years of their lives in prison or were themselves detained in children's prisons.

In the new sections of the exhibition, we aim to address topics such as the revolution, the fall of the communist regime and the emergence of democracy, effectively guiding children towards the present day. This part of the exhibition is still under development.

An essential element of our approach is to allow children to engage with the exhibits physically. For example, we feature biographies of former communist leaders of Romania, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu. Children are prompted to place these biographies in metal cabinets, symbolising the imprisonment of many Romanian citizens by these leaders without just cause. Through this metaphor, we 'imprison' the leaders themselves in the cabinets. Children are then invited to release them and learn more about their lives and actions.

I believe this metaphor is both powerful and engaging. Some children are hesitant – even frightened – and refuse to open the cabinets, while others find the activity fascinating. It offers them an opportunity to learn not only about historical figures but also about themselves and their responses to such symbolic acts.

> We hope both parents and teachers will place greater importance on nurturing civic awareness. Civic education is not merely a subject in school – it's about preparing children for life, for their role in society and even defending themselves when necessary.

When we launched the museum, we also introduced a diary-like learning tool called *My Communist History Journal*. This chronicle of Romania's communist era is written in accessible, child-friendly language. It features various exercises, encouraging children to become detectives of history.

We avoid overwhelming them with intricate details or facts about communism. Instead, we aim to spark conversations with their families and peers. For example, one task asks children to assume the role of a journalist and interview their parents about their experiences and perceptions of communism. They're encouraged to ask what their parents know about resistance to the regime.

Of course, the exhibition also touches on the experiences of children imprisoned in places like Pitești Prison. We invite young visitors to reflect on the hardships these children endured, such as being deprived of sleep, being under constant supervision and enduring regular physical abuse. We ask them to imagine: *What do you think went through the minds of these children when they couldn't sleep?*

It seems that you aim to emphasise children's active participation in the learning process, encouraging them to experience it rather than simply receiving information. Could you elaborate on how you present the ideology of communism? You mentioned Karl Marx is part of the exhibition.

MA: We are talking about children who often have no prior knowledge of communism, as the Romanian education system does not address the subject comprehensively or systematically.

We start by explaining that communist ideology sought to unite everyone through

revolution, but within this vision lay a deep animosity towards a specific class coupled with the desire to make all people uniform and equal. Rather than focusing on the authors themselves, we present the core ideas. I believe this raises broader questions about what it means to be different and how one can live with that difference. We aim to incorporate a civic dimension into the exhibition, which is why we also discuss children's rights. For example, we remind them that their parents had to attend school on Saturdays, perform certain tasks for the state – such as picking grapes and harvesting vegetables – and sing songs praising the president's greatness. We then ask the children: *Would you agree to such conditions? How would you feel if you had to live the way your parents or grandparents did?*

In Romania, there isn't much emphasis on civic education, and we want to fill this gap. We hope both parents and teachers will place greater importance on nurturing civic awareness. Civic education is not merely a subject in school – it's about preparing children for life, for their role in society and even defending themselves when necessary. It's about ensuring they are ready to navigate the challenges of the world.

Some might argue that discussing such complex and painful periods is unnecessary, especially with children. How would you respond to such remarks?

MA: I offer this analogy: hiding an infected wound only makes the situation worse. The wound needs to be cleaned and treated; only then can healing begin. The process will undoubtedly be painful – touching an infected, festering wound always hurts. But eventually, it will heal, leaving a scar that may even be smaller if treated in time.

Waiting for the wound to turn gangrenous, to the point where an arm or leg must be amputated, is hardly a wise course of action. So much time has passed since communist regimes in Europe collapsed, and yet we have barely begun to address this history openly.

I believe many of the deep traumas and challenges faced by our societies today stem from unresolved issues of the past. In Romania, there is much pride in the country's liberation from communist rule, but also a lingering sense of guilt for not having done more as a society. We stood by and watched as our neighbours were oppressed, tortured and imprisoned. Even now, we often refuse to discuss these experiences openly. We still refuse to talk about it. If we were to truly confront this history, we would also have to face our own uncomfortable feelings and fears. These unresolved emotions fester if left unspoken. Without addressing them, we cannot move forwards. Open dialogue, however painful, is the only path towards genuine healing and progress.

What reactions have you received from the public and the children who visit the museum?

MA: We haven't encountered any negative reactions, which suggests that society is now more prepared for such an initiative and, in some ways, already familiar with our work.

What surprised me most were the reactions of the children – they knew more than we had expected. Of course, before creating the museum, we conducted various activities and focus groups with children, involving about 3,000 participants. This gave us some insight into what children think, but they still managed to surprise us.

Interestingly, we realised that it's not only children but also adults who often don't really know what communism as an ideology was. In fact, when we began working on the museum, we often encountered the phrase, 'Communism was a great idea, but it was poorly implemented in practice.' From my perspective, that's simply not true. This idea was never good to begin with. Perhaps we are inclined to believe in the ideals of communism because, in reality, we don't know much about them. That's precisely why we wanted to address this in our museum – to provide a space for reflection and understanding about the true nature of communism and its impact.

Romania and Lithuania share some similar historical experiences. In Lithuania, there is currently much debate about the past, with ongoing disputes regarding the memory of Lithuanian figures who served the Communist Party. For example, Antanas Venclova was a poet and literary critic, but also a political figure. In Vilnius, there is still a museum dedicated not only to him but also to his son, Tomas Venclova – a poet, dissident and exile from the USSR to the United States. The museum is located in their former home, which also carries interwar history. As a professional in the museum field, how would you approach such a museum?

MA: Today, cancel culture has gained popularity, but it's something I personally reject. It erases certain moments from history. If we want to critically engage with history, we must first understand it. Without knowledge, and by selectively focusing only on aspects that seem worth discussing, we are not dealing with true history.

We face a similar situation in Romania regarding a poet who was favourable to the regime and his associated museum. It's essential to recognise these individuals, to understand their actions and choices. Regarding the family you mentioned, we can address the different dimensions of their lives. Every individual is a person with a history, a family and the capacity to love their children. At the same time, we must also highlight their misdeeds and moral failings. I don't believe abolishing a museum is a valuable solution. Far more important is fostering dialogue about it and the complex choices people had to make.

It seems to me that this lesson is powerfully reflected in the phenomenon of Pitești Prison: you never truly know who you are or how you might act until you find yourself in a difficult situation. In such moments, you see yourself stripped of embellishments, and what you discover may not always be pleasant. After all, in Pitești Prison, individuals who were once friends turned on each other. These were remarkable people, and even after enduring the horrors of this brutal experimental prison, they went on to lead lives without harming others. Yet, their actions within the prison cannot be erased from their past. At the Pitești Prison Museum, we pursue a similar mission: to show that the conditions these people faced were fundamentally unjust, regardless of who they were.

This interview was first published on the portal www.lrt.lt on 16 June 2024: https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/2295345/komunizmo-muziejaus-vaikams-kureja-puliuojancios-zaizdos-slepimas-tik-pablogina-situacija.

'In Between?' Exploring the Stories of European Borderlands

The 'In Between?' project inspires students and young professionals to explore the complex history of European borderlands using an interdisciplinary approach.

The programme's aim is to shed light on the intricacies of the 20th century, focusing on perspectives that are often overlooked in mainstream historical narratives. Participants, selected through an international recruitment process, come from diverse fields such as history, cultural anthropology, sociology, linguistics, journalism and the arts. This diversity enriches the exploration and interpretation of Europe's borderlands.

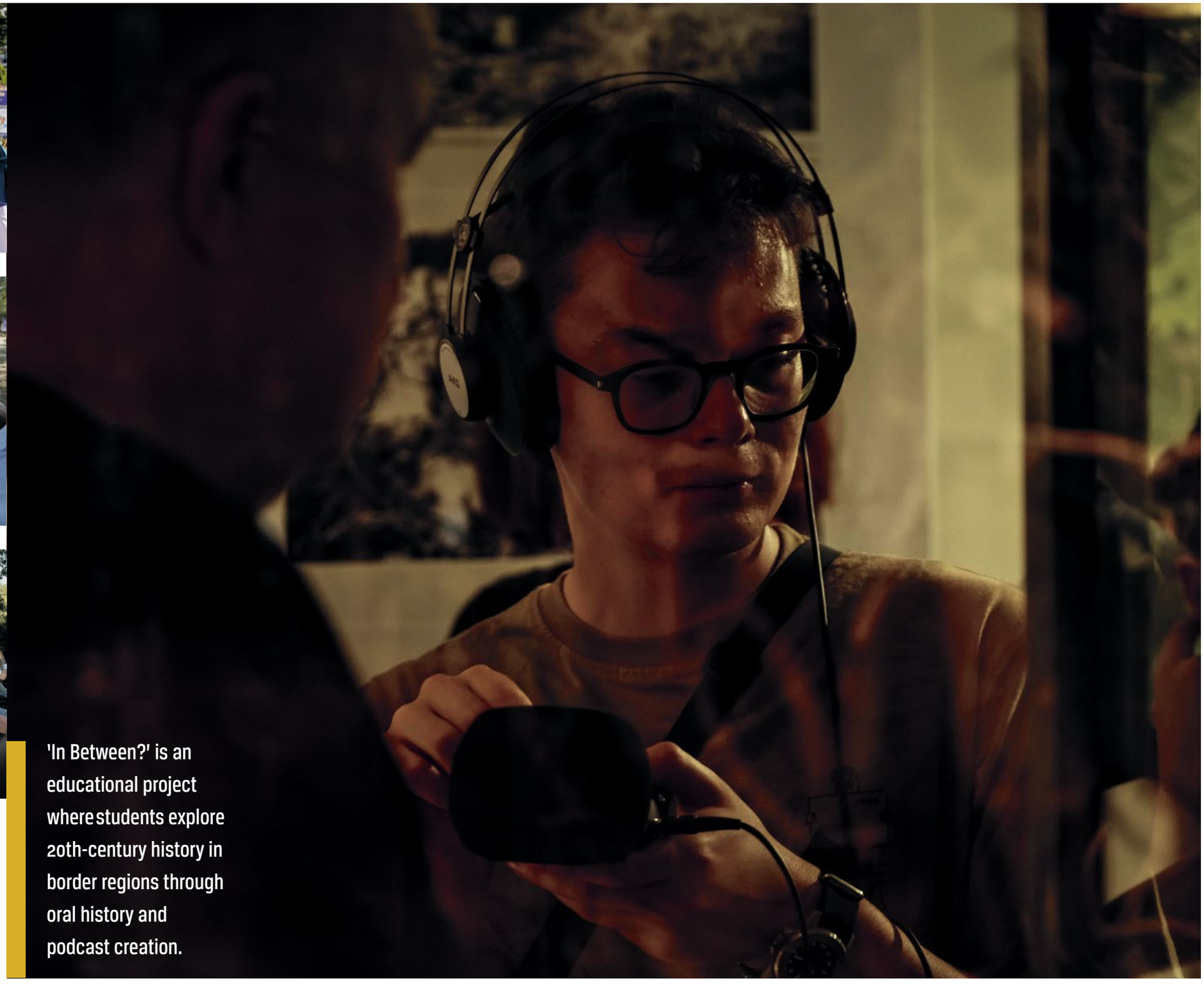
Each study visit to current or former border regions across Europe is preceded by a series of workshops. These sessions equip participants with essential technical skills, oral-history research methods and a thorough understanding of the historical context. Armed with these tools, they conduct interviews with local community members, visit museums and memorial sites, and capture their findings in the form of videos or podcasts.

The study visits to the borderlands begin with training in oral history research and the technical skills needed to document the work, as with this 2024 meeting in Warsaw.

During the 2024 edition of 'In Between?', participants created two podcasts reflecting on their visits to the Masuria region and to Tallinn/Helsinki.

Read more about 'In Between?' and click on the interactive map to see previous editions of the programme.

The programme participants are international university students from diverse academic backgrounds.



'In Between?' is an educational project where students explore 20th-century history in border regions through oral history and podcast creation.

A member of the study visit to the Masuria region during the recording.

An important part of 'In Between?' is conducting interviews with local inhabitants who witnessed the historical events that shaped the character of the region.

Highlights from the collected materials are made available online through the ENRS website, podcast platforms like Simplecast and Spotify, and the ENRS YouTube channel. Selected content is also shared with archival platforms such as Europeana Migration, EUscreen, and Virtual Shtetl, ensuring these stories reach a broad audience.

The 2024 edition of 'In Between?' saw two teams embark on study trips. One explored the Polish–German borderlands of Masuria, while the other investigated the maritime border between Finland and Estonia.

A visit to the Memorial to the Victims of Communism during the 'In Between?' programme on the Finnish–Estonian border.

Teaching Sensitivity to a New Generation of Europeans

JOHN BEAUCHAMP
Co-founder of Free Range Productions

It's a warm evening in Pisz, a town nestled among the Masurian lakes in north-eastern Poland. An early crescent moon is reflected on the waters of Lake Roś while a light breeze whispers through the trees. It is in such serene surroundings that a group of students has gathered around a picnic table to discuss what the day has brought them: a study visit to a regional museum, perhaps a walk through a local graveyard, a meeting with a local activist …

This is not the first time I've encountered such discussions, or indeed sat down with students to make podcasts on the legacy of various European borderlands as part of the ENRS's 'In Between?' project, which explores 20th-century history in European borderlands. In 2021 I visited Bardejov in Slovakia, close to the border with Poland, but with the added element of the local Rusyn population, who are present on both sides of the border. A year later a visit to Alsace, an area which has traditionally been contested by both Germany and France. What does the border look like now, and how can we forget about the Alsatian people themselves, who are strengthening their own identity and bringing the local language back into the classroom?

Meanwhile, back on the lakeshore in Pisz, discussions turn to questions of identity, history and language as well as religion and cuisine. The group is working on a storyline for a podcast on the old Polish–Prussian borderlands. As discussions turned to the local Masurian dialect, the students started to wonder: who spoke this language, where did they speak it and why it is important? So many questions, which don't always necessarily need answers. It is enough to think, to talk and to try and understand. After all, the legacies of European borderlands are not always obvious. As such, a certain sensitivity has to be forged in the minds of these European students, many of whom were born after 1989, or even after 2004, when Poland – along with other countries

from the former Soviet bloc – joined the European Union, one of the world's largest peacetime projects, which finally came to fruition after two world wars had ravaged the continent.

Nowadays, however, for all the talk of the European Union being 'united in diversity', it seems that this peace is somewhat more fragile than we had hoped for. A growing populist tendency, seen in Europe as well as across the globe, has already claimed its first victim: the United Kingdom, which decided to leave the EU on the basis of lies, false promises and a public ballot in which part of the electorate admits it did not fully comprehend what was at stake. In the east, Russia is at war with Ukraine. Even within the bloc, political parties such as the AfD in Germany or the National Rally in France are out to essentially isolate their countries. After eight decades since the end of the Second World War, we are now beginning to realise that peace is not set in stone, and that it is a very easy path back to a Europe of warring nations.

That is why the 'In Between?' project is so important: it crosses intergenerational boundaries and reminds today's youth what life could look like without the EU and without freedom of movement, expression and even being allowed to speak your native language. It is the teaching of a certain sensitivity that will hopefully make Europe's emerging generation comprehend what is at stake. It pronounces the need to cooperate and collaborate across borders – despite our differences – and above all it teaches respect. And it is only with mutual respect that Europe can save itself from the spectre of disintegration and war. While I know that the ENRS's 'In Between?' is merely a drop in an ocean of the great need to educate European youth, I feel assured in the knowledge that steps are being taken to prepare Europe's future leaders for a diverse, democratic and just place to live, where 'united in diversity' is a reality, and not just a motto.

Planning the podcast 'Masuria – Somewhere in Between', which explores the memory of the German-Polish neighbourhood from over 80 years ago.

In the near future, the ENRS will expand its range of educational programmes to include school teachers and educators from memorial sites.

Freedom of Speech Beyond Borders

The 'Freedom of Speech Beyond Borders' project introduces post-1990 generations to the fight for freedom of expression and the story of clandestine literature in Cold War Europe. It also underscores the cross-border solidarity that united dissidents from Eastern and Western Europe in their pursuit of uncensored communication.

Over the course of nine days, youth groups will explore key European sites in the Czech Republic, France and Germany, discovering this heritage and the broader struggle for free speech on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Through visits to archives, hands-on workshops and meetings with witnesses to these events, participants will gain a firsthand insight into how literature was covertly produced and distributed under repressive regimes. They also examine why freedom of speech remains essential today, particularly in the light of contemporary challenges such as disinformation and propaganda.

The programme concludes with participants creating and disseminating their own publications, drawing inspiration from underground press techniques and sharing their collective message throughout Europe.

'Freedom of Speech Beyond Borders' is co-financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage under the 'Inspiring Culture' programme.

In Between? Teachers' Edition

A collaboration between the ENRS and the 'B-SHAPES' project

'In Between? Teachers' Edition' invites educators, teachers and heritage professionals working with teenagers to delve into the history, culture and environment of borderlands. Building on an ENRS project developed for students, this special iteration spotlights the German–Polish region of Görlitz/Zgorzelec to challenge traditional notions of borders. Participants gain hands-on experience through workshops in oral history, photography and immersive border walks, acquiring skills transferable to various contexts. Educators also receive resources to enrich their classroom practice, encouraging young people to move beyond textbooks, engage with living witnesses and critically explore their surroundings.

'In Between? Teachers' Edition' emerges from a collaboration between the ENRS and 'B-SHAPES', a Horizon Europe project led by the Centre of Border Region Studies at the University of Southern Denmark. 'B-SHAPES' investigates how borders influence European societies, culture, heritage and identity in the 21st century, with a focus on rebordering, migration, the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and Euroscepticism. Using participatory and ethnographic methods, including Citizen Science, it engages diverse communities in border regions to develop inclusive strategies for shared heritage. By shifting from national viewpoints to cross-border approaches, 'B-SHAPES' aims to empower local communities, foster unity and enhance the quality of life across Europe.

Hi-story Lessons

How to plan engaging 20th-century history lessons? How to use the knowledge of the past to enable students to understand the present? How to spot historical fake news? How to foster critical thinking?

Hi-storylessons.eu is a multilingual educational platform for teachers, educators and students with free, cross-sectional and ready-to-use resources on 20th-century European history, disinformation and historical manipulation.

The platform provides:

- materials in six languages
- videos and animations
- articles written by experts
- lesson scenario plans
- infographics
- interactive maps
- thematic case studies
- webinars

Learn more about the project.

Stay up-to-date with our educational projects!

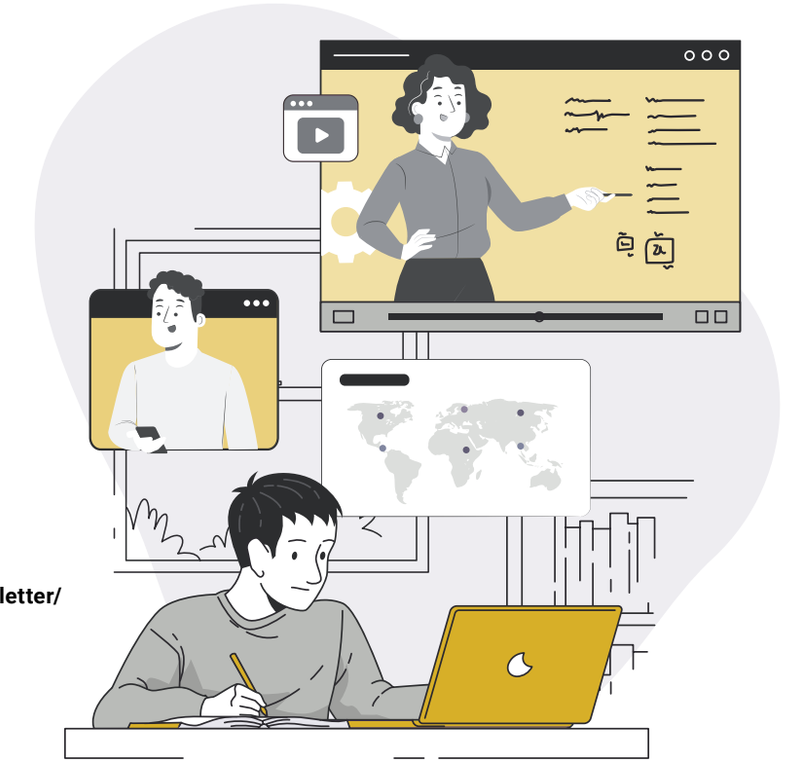
Sign up for a newsletter for teachers and educators
https://hi-storylessons.eu/newsletter/

Watch our webinar series

'Hi-story Lessons: Methods and Resources for History Teaching':

- An educational kit for teaching about the Holocaust
- How to spot historical fake news? Resources and tools for history teachers
- How to spot historical fake news? Case studies from the Second World War
- How to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day?
- Against the Holocaust: Jewish resistance
- Remembering the Holodomor
- Preparing students for a visit to a memorial site
- How to talk about the history of Roma and Sinti in the classroom?

Watch our webinar series 'Hi-story Lessons'.



PROJECTS FOR ACADEMICS

Academic opportunities

The ENRS actively engages in projects designed for students and researchers, aiming to foster collaboration and academic growth.

The network seeks talented individuals to contribute to its scholarly conferences, publications and other initiatives that require academic expertise. Additionally, the ENRS offers an internship programme at its Warsaw office, providing university students and humanities graduates from across Europe with valuable professional experience.

The international academic conferences organised by the ENRS, in partnership with institutions from across Europe, serve as a dynamic forum for scholars and researchers. These events encourage the exchange of ideas, the sharing of projects and in-depth discussions on significant topics related to history and memory studies.

The ENRS Internship Programme (Erasmus +)

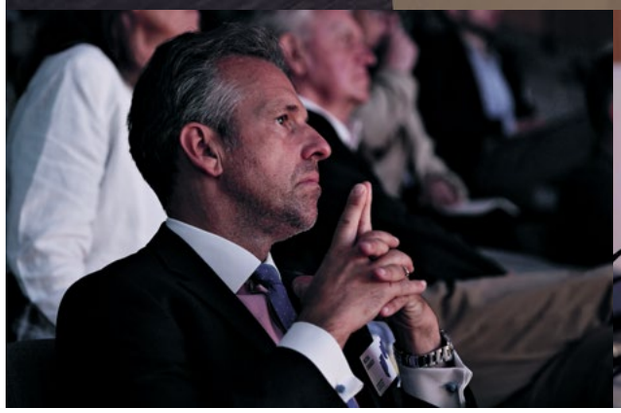
We seek motivated, responsible and proactive individuals from all over Europe to provide direct support to our team in Warsaw, Poland. Students with a passion for history and an interest in working in an international environment are welcome to apply. Applications from outside Erasmus+ are also considered.
Contact: Beata Drzazga: **beata.drzazga@enrs.eu**

Genealogies of Memory

The annual conference 'Genealogies of Memory' is a cornerstone initiative of the ENRS. Its primary aim is to foster intellectual exchange among scholars from diverse disciplines related to memory and history while promoting their research within the international academic community.

Dr Silke Marburg delivering a lecture during the panel on ethos, identity and biography.

The conference focused on the nobility, aristocracy and gentry, and featured 10 discussion panels exploring different aspects of their history and legacy.



Learn more aboutt the conference.

Professor Longina Jakubowska during the keynote lecture on challenges in researching the memory of elites.

The 14th edition of 'Genealogies of Memory' brought together nearly 60 speakers from various fields for four days of lectures and discussions.

Objectives of 'Genealogies of Memory':

- To explore the unique characteristics of history and memory in Central and Eastern Europe by examining the evolving practices of remembrance in the region throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.
- To situate the study of history and memory within a broader European and global context, highlighting how memory research from Central and Eastern Europe can contribute to the wider field of social and cultural memory studies.

The 14th 'Genealogies of Memory', dedicated to gentry, nobility and aristocracy from a post-feudal perspective, examined how Europe's landowning elites have been remembered since their dissolution as a distinct social class. The event investigated the complexities of class relations and cultural identity that shaped Europe in the 20th century. Researchers from many disciplines explored the varied social trajectories arising from these legacies, ranging from the 'Bloodlands' experiences in Eastern Europe to more gradual transformations in the West. Among the topics addressed during lectures and discussions was the ongoing relevance of heritage sites, such as manors, parks and palaces, and the impact of restitution or new ownership on collective memory. By comparing different national experiences, participants aimed to move beyond a simple East–West dichotomy and consider universal and specific approaches. The conference sought to reveal how post-feudal structures continue to influence European societies today.

Previous 'Genealogies of Memory' conferences:

- **2011:** Genealogies of Memory in Central and Eastern Europe: Theories and Methods
- **2012:** Regions of Memory: A Comparative Perspective on Eastern Europe
- **2013:** Legal Frames of Memory: Transitional Justice in Central and Eastern Europe
- **2014:** Collective vs Collected Memories: 1989–1991 from an Oral History Perspective
- **2015:** Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspective
- **2016:** Regions of Memory II: Memory Regions as Discourse and Imagination
- **2017:** Image, History and Memory
- **2018:** Memory and Religion: Central and Eastern Europe in a Global Perspective
- **2019:** Myths, Memories and Economies: Post-Socialist Transformations in Comparison
- **2020**: The Holocaust between Global and Local Perspectives
- **2021**: European Remembrance and Solidarity, co-organisation of the Memory Studies Association (MSA) annual conference
- **2022:** History and Memory in International Relations
- **2023:** Pandemics, Famines and Industrial Disasters of the 20th and 21st Centuries
- **2024:** Gentry, Nobility and Aristocracy: Post-Feudal Perspectives
- **2025:** What Is Left from the Second World War: Historical Narratives and Objects in Focus

A visit to the Sobański Palace in Guzów during the 14th Genealogies of Memory conference, dedicated to the nobility, aristocracy and gentry.

Selected lectures from past 'Genealogies of Memory' have been included in the book series *'European Remembrance and Solidarity'* published by Routledge.

Memory and What Stands Behind It

MAŁGORZATA PAKIER

Head of the ENRS Academic Department

Memory is a subject that goes far beyond the boundaries of individual experience. How we remember, what we remember and why we remember shapes not only our identity but also the way we understand our past, present and future. Memory is the foundation of culture, ideology and politics. It forms a space where history meets emotions, and individual experiences intertwine with broader social narratives. In contemporary Europe, memory has become one of the key tools in reflecting on history.

In this context, memory is not static or finite. It is a process that is constantly changing: it is negotiated and transformed in response to new challenges, and it is open to new discoveries and interpretations. Through projects such as 'To Understand Memory', established in 2024, and 'Genealogies of Memory', we ask questions about how our memory of the past shapes our decisions and identities in the modern world.

To understand memory

The 'To Understand Memory' project is an attempt to create a dialogue between two worlds: the world of science and the world of reportage. Reportage and non-fiction literature have a special role in describing the past – they combine facts with emotions and narration with personal experience. In this cycle of discussions, historians and reporters come together to analyse the latest publications that address themes related to history and memory.

The aim of the project is to show how these two worlds – academic and literary – can mutually inspire and influence one another. How literature can benefit from precise scholarly tools to enrich its language, while history and academic research can benefit from the sensitivity of reportage to better

convey the complexity of human experience. This interdisciplinary dialogue helps us better understand the memory processes taking place in societies, particularly in Poland and Europe, where history is still a living field of disputes and reflections.

Memory in the context of 'To Understand Memory' is thus not just a process of collecting facts, but also an attempt to capture what is invisible and subjective, related to emotions and interpretations. In this project, it is important that questions about history are not confined to a single scientific order but become a space for open discussion, where various perspectives – both from researchers and literary creators – can meet.

Genealogies of Memory

The 'Genealogies of Memory' project, on the other hand, focuses on international academic dialogue, especially in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. Its goal is to facilitate the exchange of experiences between memory scholars from this region and promote the study of memory from this part of Europe on the international academic stage. This project examines the changing practices of remembrance in the region and the way memory of historical events influences contemporary perceptions of the past and national identities.

In particular, the project focuses on the relationship between history and memory, trying to answer the question of how historical experiences, especially in the 20th century, shape social memory. From the perspective of 'Genealogies of Memory', it is crucial that memory research is sensitive to historical context – memory should not be viewed in isolation from the experiences that shaped it. In this sense, memory is not just a tool for transmitting facts, but a process through which entire societies experience history, influencing their subsequent choices, identifications and attitudes.

On the one hand, the 'Genealogies of Memory' project seeks to understand the specificity of memory in Central and Eastern Europe while, on the other hand, it opens a space for reflecting on memory in a broader European and global context. History, as it turns out, is not uniform – depending on the experiences of each region and society, memory of the same past may look completely different. This understanding that memory is a dynamic, ever-changing reality is one of the key elements behind this project.

Memory as a living process

In today's world, full of uncertainty and instability, it becomes especially important not to provide just simple answers, but to ask questions that help us better understand the diversity of experiences and memories. Rather than imposing a single narrative about the past, it is more important to listen and appreciate different perspectives that emerge from the distinct histories and experiences of various communities of memory. Contemporary societies must find a way to engage in open, empathetic conversations about memory, one that does not forget the traumas of the past but seeks to understand them in the context of contemporary challenges. This approach allows for more informed decision-making and openness to dialogue, which can lead to deeper understanding and coexistence in diverse societies.

'Genealogies of Memory' is one of the ENRS's longest-running initiatives for academics. Launched in 2011, it features a series of seminars focused on Central and Eastern Europe.

Małgorzata Omilanowska, Polish Minister of Culture, at the 'Genealogies of Memory' conference in 2013.

The book series 'European Remembrance and Solidarity'

The ENRS in cooperation with the academic publisher Routledge launched a book series dedicated to history and remembrance in 20th-century Europe with special attention given to the experiences of Central and Eastern Europe.

With this series, the ENRS wishes to contribute to the current intellectual debate on European integration, memory and identity by a complex analysis of the dynamically changing socio-political and cultural environments. The series comprises of volumes on memory and historical consciousness of Central and East European societies and examines diverse aspects of past and present civilisation, such as art and cultural activity; religion and churches; and political culture and diplomacy, authored and edited by scholars of various disciplines, including history, art history, anthropology, sociology and political science.

All volumes are a result of the academic and research projects run by, or in cooperation with, the ENRS.

Titles in the series:

- ***A New Europe, 1918–1923: Instability, Innovation, Recovery***

  Edited by Bartosz Dziewanowski-Stefańczyk and Jay Winter

  This set of essays introduces readers to new historical research on the creation of the new order in East-Central Europe in the period immediately following 1918.

- ***Image, History and Memory: Central and Eastern Europe in a Comparative Perspective***

  Edited by Michał Haake and Piotr Juszkiewicz

  The volume discusses the active relationship among the mechanics of memory, visual practices and historical narratives.

- ***Memory and Religion from a Postsecular Perspective***

  Edited by Zuzanna Bogumił and Yuliya Yurchuk

  The book argues that religion is a system of significant meanings that have an impact on other systems and spheres of social life, including cultural memory.

- ***Remembering the Neoliberal Turn: Economic Change and Collective Memory in Eastern Europe after 1989***

  Edited by Veronika Pehe and Joanna Wawrzyniak

  A study on how societies, groups and individuals remember and make sense of global neoliberal change in Eastern Europe.

- ***Disinformation in Memory Politics***

  Edited by Bartosz Dziewanowski-Stefańczyk and Florin Abraham

  A volume on the impact of disinformation on both internal and foreign memory politics, which will explore theoretical approaches, current mechanisms and actors of disinformation and suggest some possible ways of prevention.

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Learn more about the series.

PROJECTS FOR INSTITUTIONS DEALING WITH 20th-CENTURY HISTORY

European Remembrance Symposium

The annual symposium seeks to foster and enhance partnerships between organisations and institutions devoted to studying Europe's 20th-century past. Central to this initiative is the belief that dialogue on the events of the previous century account for diverse perspectives, experiences and interpretations.

Since its inception in 2012, the European Remembrance Symposium has embraced a multidisciplinary and intercultural view of modern history, securing its position as one of Europe's foremost networking forums devoted to memory-related matters. Hosted each year in a different European city, the event unites representatives from government and civil society, alongside historians, educational specialists and journalists. Together, they explore recent developments in historical research and strive to create engaging methods of sharing history with broader audiences. Participants are invited to join panel discussions and networking sessions, providing a platform to introduce their organisations and projects to a wider public.

Top: Hanna Wróblewska, the Polish Minister of Culture, at the inauguration of the 12th European Remembrance Symposium at the newly opened Museum of Polish History in Warsaw. Left: Robert Kostro (founding director of the Museum of Polish History, Poland) and Heta Hedman (Historians Without Borders, Finland).

Learn more about the Symposium.

Concluding discussion of the symposium. From left to right: Hanna Liubakova (moderator), Martin Andreller, Łukasz Kamiński, Miloš Řezník and Laura Kolbe.

The 12th Remembrance Symposium was dedicated to the ways European nations commemorate and narrate freedom. Over three days, discussions at the Polish History Museum in Warsaw revolved around the questions: What does freedom mean today, and what did it mean throughout the 20th century? How did both the struggle for freedom and its celebration become enshrined in the cultural and historical memory of different regions? And how has freedom been commemorated in museum narratives, both in the past and today?

European Remembrance Symposiums

- **2012:** Does European Culture of Memory Exist?
  Gdańsk, Poland, 14–15 September
- **2013:** How Much Transnational Cooperation Does European Remembrance Require? Caesuras and Parallels in Europe
  Berlin, Germany, 10–12 October
- **2014:** Turning Points in 20th-Century European History: Europe between War and Peace 1914–2004
  Prague, Czech Republic, 9–11 April
- **2015:** Remembrance of the Second World War 70 Years After: Winners, Losers, Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders
  Vienna, Austria, 11–13 May
- **2016:** 1956: Contexts – Impact – Remembrance
  Budapest, Hungary, 24–26 May
- **2017:** Violence in 20th-Century European History: Commemorating, Documenting, Educating
  Brussels, Belgium, 6–8 June
- **2018**: After the Great War: Challenges for Europe 1918–2018
  Bucharest, Romania, 15–17 May
- **2019:** The Making and Re-Making of Europe: 1919–2019
  Paris, France, 27–29 May
- **2021**: Memory and Identity in Europe: Present and Future
  Tallinn, Estonia, 26–28 October
- **2022:** Reconciliation: a Long and Winding Path
  Dublin, Ireland, 1–3 June
- **2023:** Resistance and Solidarity
  Barcelona, Spain, 9–11 May
- **2024:** Commemorating and Narrating Freedom
  Warsaw, Poland, 21–24 May
- **2025:** The Spirit of Helsinki Then and Now: Conference on the 50th Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act
  Helsinki, Finland, 10–13 June

The annual symposium gathers representatives of organisations and institutions that shape memory policy in contemporary Europe. Pictured: Anna Bernhardt (Maisons-Laffitte).

The evening programme of the symposium featured a concert by the Młynarski-Masecki Jazz Band, blending vintage Polish jazz with a modern twist.

The event is widely regarded as one of Europe's leading networking forums dedicated to memory-related issues. Pictured: Simina Badica (House of European History).

When History Still Hurts: Dealing with the Legacy of Conflict

INTERVIEW WITH BARBARA WALSHE

Board Chair of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation from 2014 to 2022, and now Expertise Support at the ENRS

Barbara, you define yourself as a worker for peace. How do you understand it?

BW: I observe a world that is polarised, where people often fail to understand each other or simply refuse to do so. My role is to help people have a conversation – sometimes a challenging one – that allows them to reach a better understanding of one another.

What brought you to the ENRS?

BW: It happened by accident! At the time, in 2021, I was chairing the board of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, an Irish NGO that has been active for 50 years. It was established after the conflict broke out in Ireland, particularly in Northern Ireland, to foster peace. Glencree created a safe space for bringing together people who either hated each other, misunderstood each other or simply had no desire to interact. Through my work there, I received an invitation from the ENRS and went to Tallinn for the first time to attend the symposium. I listened to people discussing the effects of communism and two world wars in a complex history I did not fully grasp. Yet I recognised a familiar legacy of conflict that mirrored what we had experienced in Ireland. I was struck by the similarities and ashamed by my own ignorance of what Central and Eastern Europe had suffered.

And then, in 2022, the symposium was organised together with the Glencree Centre in Dublin … Can you tell me more about this experience?

BW: I was delighted that ENRS chose the topic of reconciliation in collaboration with Glencree, giving participants the opportunity to engage in workshops led by the centre. These workshops highlighted the role of women and new communities in peacebuilding. The symposium's title, 'Reconciliation: a Long and Winding Path', was an accurate description of a process that requires time, attention and patience. In the Irish context, the search of truth and justice for victims of conflict was often set aside to achieve a peace agreement, leaving behind a difficult legacy that still exists today, 30 years later.

During the symposium, a diverse group of non-governmental actors, diplomats and practitioners shared their countries' experiences of working towards reconciliation at the turn of the 21st century. In both the Polish-German and Irish cases, it was clear that while political and legal frameworks for peace agreements were crucial, they were merely starting points for rebuilding relationships. This was achieved not just through words but through exchange and dialogue initiatives centred on art and education. Examples of effective leadership were highlighted, including a willingness to offer sincere apologies, undertake restoration efforts and provide reparations, both financial and symbolic. There was a readiness to collaborate with those who had caused profound harm, all in the interest of creating a better future for the next generations.

So how can you say that the Northern Irish experiences can be used in the general European context?

BW: I see a few key points. One is that, as a consequence of war and violence, many people are silenced. That silence is often an internal experience: they are afraid to speak out. In the Irish context, it was some 20 years after the 1998 Peace Agreement that people finally started to talk about the violence they had experienced, whether they lost family members directly or suffered other forms of trauma. In some cases, religion had been weaponised which further increased fear of the 'other'. When people meet 'the other' and realise that conflict feels the same for everyone, victimhood becomes something they share.

Trust within and between communities was eroded leading to the saying in Northern Ireland: 'Whatever you say, say nothing.' While communal identity is still strongly held, the recognition within the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement made it possible to hold multiple identities, you could be Irish or British or both. The question arises: do we have to be one or the other, or can we embrace both?

And can you apply it also on the level of the whole European Union?

BW: Yes, as I learn more, I see how an increase in extreme nationalism leads people to draw borders, yet they also belong to wider groups. Historically identities were more fluid, with different ethnic communities occupying various territories and regions that did not necessarily reflect modern national identities. This is relevant in the EU context as well. As for the Irish case, let me quote Naomi Long, Alliance Party leader, Northern Ireland Justice Minister and passionate European, who spoke recently about the value of the European perspective to the island in conflict. In an interview, she said that people like her valued the European project because it was part of something bigger, an overarching European identity all could buy into. The brilliance of the EU was that it was trying to diminish the impact of borders. There was less emphasis on division, and more on cooperation, collaboration, working together and harmonising both systems so that the border on the island of Ireland became an invisible thing.

How do you actually work with this dialogue? What are your practical experiences – how is reconciliation or dialogue placed at the centre?

BW: I think the word 'reconciliation' is often misused. It is not a single event but a long process, often needing careful attention. In Northern Ireland, for instance, people experienced a long violent conflict but we also need to look at the Republic of Ireland's history. We had mother-and-baby homes where vulnerable women were forced to give up their babies as single mothers. Survivors

Projects such as ‘Sound in the Silence’ engage young people through art, drama and more practical approaches, letting them connect with history.

of institutions and, more recently, the child abuse crisis within the Catholic Church have given people a voice to discharge the shame they were made to feel as a result of what happened to them.

Are there any concrete cases where you can see this method being applied to ENRS topics?
BW: Yes, I see them everywhere in ENRS projects like ‘In Between?’ and ‘Sound in the Silence’. They are very innovative. They engage young people through art, drama and more practical approaches, letting them connect with history. Teens often see history as ancient, so bridging that gap is crucial. I would love to see more facilitator-led circle discussions around contentious historical narratives. A structured methodology – knowing the context, preparing safe spaces and building trust – would help participants understand each other. Training facilitators to guide these conversations in different languages might be beneficial.

The ENRS’s mission statement includes an element of international dialogue. If you could offer one piece of advice on making good conversations happen – at conferences, educational programmes and during academic endeavours – what would it be? How do we bring people to talk and feel comfortable?
BW: Listening and speaking are at the core of a good conversation.

OK – we have the ‘what’? Now tell me ‘how’?
BW: I often a circle approach, as described below, for difficult topics. I facilitated circles with survivors of institutions – people who went in at age 8 or 10 and came out at 16, with no parental figures. I also worked with survivors of sexual abuse, helping them speak alongside the priests or congregations that had once harboured abusers. Preparation is key: know the issue, establish why you are there and gain trust. Consult participants first, listen to their anger or needs, then bring them together. We set ground rules about confidentiality, respecting each other and allowing a ‘pass’ when emotions run high. We might use a ‘talking piece’ that is passed around, letting only the holder speak. The first round often focuses on why they came. The second might address the central issue or what they now want. It is not therapy, but it can be therapeutic and future-oriented.

What is an expected outcome of such a procedure?
BW: Sometimes it is simply helping people hear their own voice and articulate their own needs. It can also form new relationships, allowing them to support each other. Telling a story – maybe for the first time – can be a big step. Others in the circle may empathise in ways that help heal some wounds. Essentially, it can build community and address the issues that caused harm.

You have stayed in Warsaw and worked with the ENRS over the past few months. What future do you envision for yourself following this experience?
BW: For the first three months, I did not grasp the full picture of what the ENRS does. Now I am learning about Poland and Central and Eastern Europe while discovering the ENRS’s many projects. The organisation works carefully, supporting young participants and learning from each endeavour. I am interested in how history intersects with peacemaking and conflict mediation.

Had you explored that intersection before joining the ENRS?
BW: No, only since I have been here. I now understand the ENRS’s mission to examine 20th-century history, produce resources, host academic conferences and foster discussion. My question is: what is the point of history if we keep repeating mistakes? How does it connect with ongoing conflicts, where peace mediation is needed? Good historical research is essential, but we still see wars and violence. I am fascinated by how peace mediation might learn from past conflicts.

During your workshops, you often mention that Northern Ireland’s reconciliation worked because it was about a recent past, not an ongoing event. Conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine are happening now and sparking deep division. Is there a way for you to work on current, non-historical issues?
BW: I do not know. In Ireland we had 30 years of violence. Eventually we reached what was called a ‘mutually hurting stalemate’, where both sides suffered enough to make them want something different. That forced negotiations. Nobody wants a protracted war in Ukraine, but if both sides lose heavily, they will have to talk at some point. In Ireland, paramilitaries continued existing after the conflict. We still deal with the consequences of that.

How does one work with a ruined community?
BW: You begin with their needs. Rebuilding infrastructure – jobs, houses, schools – is crucial, but there’s also the psychological aftermath. People need a chance to speak about their losses or trauma. Without that, mental health deteriorates, resentments linger and another conflict can flare up. Signing an agreement is just the beginning of the peace process, not the end.

So economic reconstruction alone is not enough?
BW: No, but it is still important. People need homes and livelihoods. Yet they also need opportunities to gather and share what happened to them, it helps them look to the future.

Special events

During the special event series 'To Understand Memory: Between Academic and Literary Writing', leading historians and prominent Polish literary journalists shared their perspectives on portraying history and memory.

Drawing on their works – which cover closely related themes – each author discusses their research methods and examines how literary and historical approaches can inform and enhance one another. Organised by the ENRS, the History Meeting House and the Center for Research on Social Memory in Warsaw, these conversations are moderated by Małgorzata Pakier and feature:

- **Filip Springer and Małgorzata Praczyk**: on a post-anthropocentric perspective, time and secrets of the academic and literary writing
- **Joanna Kuciel-Frydryszak and Ewelina Szpak**: on social change in the Polish countryside, historical perspective and the use of sources
- **Łukasz Bukowiecki and Ziemowit Szczerek**: on the city's memory and oblivion in journalistic narrative
- **Katarzyna Surmiak-Domańska and Michał Bilewicz**: on discovering and dealing with intergenerational traumas and their universal dimension
- **Beata Chomątowska and Marcin Stasiak**: on childhood chronic illnesses and life with a disease-related stigma and differences between a journalistic and an academic approach to personal experiences
- **Kamil Iwanicki and Marta Michalska**: on sounds and spaces as identity-shaping elements of everyday life
- **Kamil Bałuk and Dariusz Piechota**: on television, pop culture and nostalgia for the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s

In the near future, 'To Understand Memory' meetings will bring together academics and journalists in other member countries of the ENRS.

The event series 'To Understand Memory' provides a space for leading historians and prominent literary journalists to discuss their working methods and exchange ideas.

Cooperation with other institutions

In 2024 we participated as partners in 20 events, where we took part in debates and panel discussions, gave lectures and led workshops on history education and providing skills, such as fact checking and conflict management.

Among others, we attended:

- European Innovation Days in Strasbourg
- The meeting of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Paris
- The conference 'From Crisis to Future: New Responsibilities for Museums in Ukraine' in Berlin
- The Public History Summer School in Wrocław
- The international conference '80 Years After the Destruction of the Kaunas Ghetto – What Do We Remember, What Have We Learnt?'
- The annual CRIC Conference on the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at the University of Oxford
- The 7th Annual Meeting, 'Taking Stock of European Memory Policies: Diversity of Memories & Citizens' Participation', organised by the EUROM and Maison Jean Monnet in Brussels
- The International Forum Moldova in Chisinau

Networking is a vital part of the ENRS's work, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among professionals, as demonstrated during our visit to the Museum of Textiles in Łódź, 2024.

We hosted representatives from Taiwan's Department of Human Rights and Transitional Justice and the secretary of the Taipei Representative Office in Poland. We shared experiences with members of other institutions dealing with remembrance and heritage during study trips to the Roma Association in Auschwitz, the International Cultural Centre in Kraków, and the headquarters of the Literary Institute, a Polish-language publishing house, in Maisons-Laffitte near Paris and the Central Museum of Textiles in Łodź.

237 PROJECTS

So far, we have run 237 projects in 32 countries, engaging 550 partner institutions from 43 countries. Interested in becoming our partner? If you work for an institution active in the field of history and memory of the 20th-century Europe that would like to establish cooperation with us, send your proposal to: office@enrs.eu

550 INSTITUTIONS FROM 43 COUNTRIES

People of the ENRS

Behind every project, publication and international initiative of the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity stands a team of dedicated, passionate individuals. The following photos offer a glimpse into the human side of the ENRS – the people who imagine, create and carry out our work across borders. These are the faces behind the scenes, the moments between events and the connections that make collaboration possible. This is how the ENRS looks like through the eyes of those who shape it every day.


ANTYKI

ENRS ASSEMBLIES AND TEAM

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is the ENRS's top decision-making body. Its members, the ENRS coordinators, are appointed by the member countries' ministers of culture or their counterparts. Each member country is represented by one person and, on occasion, by two. In either case each country has only one vote. The Steering Committee makes decisions regarding the ENRS's strategy and projects. The function of the chairperson is rotational and changes every six months.

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Advisory Board

The Advisory Board draws its members from among prominent representatives of the worlds of learning, culture and politics in ENRS member countries and in countries that are not yet full members but are interested in participating. The board's principal responsibilities are commenting on the overall directions of the ENRS's medium- and long-term development and representing the network in its member countries and elsewhere.

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Academic Council

The Academic Council is made up of prominent historians and social scientists. Its principal tasks include suggesting areas of ENRS research and educational activities, reviewing proposals for scholarly projects, representing the ENRS at conferences, congresses and scholarly meetings and evaluating the network's scholarly activities.

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Gender Equality at the ENRS

Since its inception, the ENRS has upheld respect for individual dignity, ensuring gender equality and preventing discrimination or gender-based violence. We integrate gender considerations into all project stages and apply internal rules on safety and equal treatment. Aligned with European Commission guidelines, our Gender Equality Plan offers a systematic approach to promoting equality within both our projects and daily operations.

Sustainable Development at the ENRS

We are equally committed to reducing our ecological footprint. Within our office, we cut paper use, optimise energy consumption and improve recycling. For events, we encourage carpooling or public transport, provide vegetarian dishes and seasonal foods, avoid disposable items and minimise promotional printing – often opting for recycled paper or digital formats. Each step, from workplace practices to event planning, helps foster a more sustainable future.

The ENRS team at the 12th European Remembrance Symposium in Warsaw, 2024.

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European (and even worldwide) initiatives on historical memory are more than vital. Not only do they bring together different states but also, more importantly, different people from a variety of cultural and historical backgrounds. Understanding each other's history – in some ways similar but yet diverse – is the key for learning and making a better future happen. A future where history is not weaponised and used against democracy and humanity. A future where crimes against humanity would finally come to an end. For that, I believe initiatives such as the ENRS are important for Europe and for the world and humanity as well.

MARTIN ANDRELLER

Estonian Institute of Historical Memory, Member observer of the ENRS Advisory Board

The real value of the ENRS is that it exists and is now in its 20th year. The ENRS continues to uncover a history of courage and resilience, suffering and loss in Central and Eastern Europe that few people in Western Europe are fully aware of. It brings history to life, not just through its research but its engagement with projects that inspire and inform a whole new generation to remember to build their own lives in a society that is informed by the past but is not mired in the past.

The first time I attended one of the ENRS symposiums, I sat shocked and silenced as I listened to accounts of the impact of two world wars and communism on the people of Central Eastern Europe. Coming from Ireland with a history of conflict, it resonated deeply with me as I recognised that the legacy of violent conflict silences people for a long time before they can even acknowledge and talk about it. I knew then that I needed to learn more, and this is why I came to Poland.

BARBARA WALSHE

Board Chair of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, 2014–22, Expertise Support at the ENRS

The ENRS has proven to be the most significant international initiative devoted to developing and promoting shared narratives of 20th-century European history, especially in its central and eastern regions. Our views of the past greatly influence how we assess the present and how we plan for the future. Shaping narratives about the past that are both credible – meaning consistent with historical scholarship – and shared – meaning inclusive of the experiences of different groups and countries – has been and remains a considerable challenge. After the major conflicts that tore Europe apart in the 20th century – two world wars and the Cold War – as well as long years of dictatorial rule in many countries, which left behind a burden of grievances, this task remains as necessary as it is difficult. Today, as Russian missiles fall on Ukrainian cities and false propaganda justifies these actions on historical grounds, it is clearer than ever – even more so than 20 years ago – how crucial the network's mission truly is.

PROFESSOR DARIUSZ STOLA

Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences

Multidimensional knowledge of 20th-century European history contributes to a better understanding of our shared history and heritage. During the past 20 years, the ENRS has been playing a vital role in endorsing transnational dialogue on history and fostering critical reflection on past events. I wholeheartedly support the ENRS in its mission to promote research, education and open discussion and to further cultivate solidarity across Europe.

CONSTANZE ITZEL

Museum Director at the House of European History

A long period of close collaboration with the ENRS has left me with many fond memories. Those years saw numerous important conferences, inspiring discussions and engaging educational initiatives, in which I was privileged to take part. As always, however, people are what matter most: both the event participants and, above all, the wonderful, creative team behind the network.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all of you for the pleasure of working with the ENRS, and thanks especially to Director Rafał Rogulski, to whom I am deeply grateful for the gift of friendship forged over these many years.

ŁUKASZ KAMIŃSKI

Head of the National Ossolinski Institute, Wrocław

As a member of the Editorial Board of the ENRS publishing series I think the network is addressing the most important questions about memory by encouraging citizens to reflect beyond their national boundaries and scholars beyond their disciplinary fields. The work done by the network shows the broad implications characterising the process of remembrance in European societies. In the last 20 years the ENRS has bridged the gap between opposed national narratives and through better knowledge on difficult issues it has worked to achieve mutual understanding.

DR CATHERINE HOREL

Director of Research at the French National Centre for Scientific Research
Member of the ENRS Editorial Board

The European Network Remembrance and Solidarity is an international initiative whose aim is to foster discourse on 20th-century history and remembrance, with particular emphasis on periods of dictatorships, wars and resistance to political violence. The members of the network are Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, with representatives from Albania, Austria, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia and Lithuania present on its advisory bodies. Envisaged as an ever-developing project, the network's activities go beyond the member countries, expanding the area of dialogue about 20th-century history further across Europe.

The ENRS is engaged in various projects: from exhibitions and publications to workshops, study visits and academic conferences, many of them targeting students and researchers. The network seeks prospective collaborators for its scholarly conferences, publications and other projects, which may require academic expertise. Moreover, the ENRS runs an internship programme, offering internships at the ENRS Secretariat in Warsaw to university students and graduates of the humanities from all over Europe.

More information: www.enrs.eu