

# House of European History

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The House of European History aims to encourage citizens to reflect upon and debate the history of Europe and of European integration. Its goals are to increase knowledge, arouse curiosity and, over time, become a place for the exchange of ideas, reflection and debate about Europe and its history, linking up people, institutions and networks dealing with European history. Visitors will be challenged to critically assess European history, its potential and its future.

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# Background

## Facts and Figures

**Content:** European history, mainly of the 20th century, with a specific focus on European integration and with retrospective insights and thematic close-ups on processes and events from earlier centuries.

**Public opening:** foreseen for 6 May 2017

**Historical approach:** the House of European History aims to convey a trans-national overview of European history, taking account of its diversity and its many interpretations and perceptions. The House seeks to contribute to the understanding of European history, including the wider global context, and to stimulate debate about Europe and the European integration process. The main focus of the permanent exhibition will be on European history of the 20th century and the history of European integration, viewed from a broad historical perspective and bringing together both contrasting and shared experiences of Europeans in history.

**Objectives:** the House of European History aims to encourage citizens to reflect upon and debate the history of Europe and of European integration. Its goals are to increase knowledge, arouse curiosity and, over time, become a place for the exchange of ideas, reflection and debate about Europe and its history, linking up people, institutions and networks dealing with European history. Visitors will be challenged to critically assess European history, its potential and its future.

**Location:** Eastman Building in the Parc Léopold, at the heart of the Brussels "European district". The building was converted and enlarged by the international consortium *Atelier d'architecture Chaix & Morel & associés* (FR), *JSWD Architekten* (DE), and *TPF* (BE). The design company for the permanent exhibition is *Acciona Producciones y Diseño* (ESP) and the production company is *Meyvaert Glass Engineering* (BE).

**Languages:** The permanent exhibition is available in 24 languages and the rest of the visitor offer in at least 4 languages.

**Opening hours and conditions:** Opening 7 days per week, from 10:00-18:00 except for Monday, 13:00-18:00. Free Admission. Closed on the following dates: 1 January, 1 May, 1 November, 24, 25, 31 December.

### Visitor facilities:

Cafeteria, shop, auditorium, learning rooms.

**What it will offer:** a permanent exhibition with a presentation of exhibits which have been brought together from more than 300 museums and collections from across Europe and beyond; temporary exhibitions; educational programmes; events for local and visiting publics; publications and a range of online information.

**Target groups:** anyone interested in Europe and its history; no special knowledge required. Special information products are being developed for specific target groups, such as young people, families and schools.

**Exhibition area:** around 4000m<sup>2</sup> for the permanent exhibition, around 800 m<sup>2</sup> for temporary exhibitions.

**Permanent exhibition:** the permanent exhibition will present European political, economic, social and cultural history in a chronological layout, but with a thematic approach within this structure. Its principal focus will be on European history of the 20th century, with retrospective insights into processes and events from earlier centuries which were important for the development of the continent. A particular focus will be the history

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of European integration.

**First temporary exhibition:** "Interactions" is the House of European history's first temporary exhibition. It illuminates exemplary moments and revealing stories of encounters and exchanges in European History.

**Visitor experience:** visitors will be able to explore European history at their own pace and level and to branch off to investigate further a theme that especially interests them. The broadest possible range of modern museological tools and methods has been adopted, using for instance a layered presentation of contents, which would allow visits on different levels and rhythms. The visitor experience will be varied by changing moods and spatial typologies and by varying densities of objects and of interactive features. Recurring elements such as landmarks will link the exhibition topics.

**Costs:** the project development costs amount to approximately €55.4 million. This covers the conversion, extension and renovation of the building as well as the development and installation of the permanent exhibition and the first temporary exhibition, including the start of the build-up of a museum collection.

**Staff:** an interdisciplinary Academic Project Team, (composed of historians, museologists, learning specialists and administrators from 18 different Member States) developed the content of the exhibition. For the architectural and infrastructural development, an interdisciplinary team oversaw all the building and development work.

**Funding:** the development costs were borne by the European Parliament

**Governing bodies:** a Board of Trustees and an Academic Committee respectively supervise and advise on the project.

**The Board of Trustees:** supervises and takes decisions on fundamental matters relating to the project and is advised by Harald Rømer, formerly Secretary-General of the Parliament. It is chaired by former President of the European Parliament Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering.

**The Academic Committee:** chaired by historian Prof. Dr. Włodzimierz Borodziej and made up of university professors and experts from internationally-renowned museums, it advises the HEH Academic Project Team on all historical and museological issues.

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why set up a House of European History?

The decades-long process that has created the European Union has had a profound impact on the way European countries organise and govern themselves, but until now there has been no museum which places this process within a wider historical context, bringing together and juxtaposing the contrasting experiences of different European countries and peoples.

The generation of people who experienced the tragedies of the 20th century and went on to build the European Communities is disappearing. Now is the time, therefore, to present the development of European integration in a comprehensible way for a broader public. And to explain its main historical developments, motivating forces and aims, so as to enable future generations to understand how and why today's Union developed as and when it did. In times of crisis, it is particularly important to develop and sharpen consciousness of cultural heritage and to remember that peaceful cooperation cannot be taken for granted.

The European Parliament has therefore set up the House of European History, which will give citizens an opportunity to reflect on this historical process and on what it means for the present. Parliament believes that the museum can be a place of debate and understanding about contemporary situations from the perspective of their historical roots and in the light of historical experiences.

### What are the principles governing the project?

From the outset, the project has been driven by a desire to promote knowledge of Europe's history and to raise awareness of the diversity of memories within Europe in an open and inspiring fashion. The academic independence and international composition of the project team were preconditions and a team of historians and museum professionals from all over Europe were recruited specifically for the project. They have worked to develop the exhibitions, ensuring that the diversity of European history – and of its interpretations – is fairly represented.

A high-level advisory board (Academic Committee) composed of internationally-renowned historians and museologists ensures the academic accuracy and relevance of the content of the exhibitions.

### Where is it?

The House of European History is located in the Eastman building in the Parc Léopold, close to the European institutions. The Eastman building was built in 1935 to house a dental clinic for disadvantaged children, financed by a donation from the US businessman George Eastman, the inventor of the Kodak camera. With a view to transforming this building into a building for exhibition purposes, an architectural competition was held, which was won by a group composed of the architects Chaix & Morel et associés from France, JSWD Architekten from Germany, and TPF from Belgium. Their plans included the renovation of the façades - maintaining the historic aesthetic of the building - as well as adding a modern extension in the original building's courtyard and on its roof.

### How did the project develop?

The project to create a House of European History was initiated by the then European Parliament President, Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, in his inaugural speech of 2007. The following year, a committee of distinguished historians and museum experts from various European countries drew up a first concept for the project, entitled the "Conceptual Basis for a House of European History", which envisaged the House of European History as a modern exhibition, documentation and information centre that would reflect the latest in museological thinking.

From January 2011 onwards, an Academic Project Team was recruited. This team, brought together from across Europe, then progressively defined the vision and mission of the new museum, developed the narrative for the permanent exhibition and worked on

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different fields such as visitor policy, temporary exhibition and collecting policies. The Academic Committee advised the team in this work and agreed on the result. Parliament's Bureau (President and 14 Vice-Presidents) approved all major decisions.

## **What story does the museum tell?**

The permanent exhibition concentrates on the main phenomena and processes which have shaped contemporary Europe throughout history, and emphasizes the diversity of experience, awareness and interpretation related to these developments.

It does not portray the individual histories of Europe's states and regions. Instead, it focuses on European phenomena. The Academic Project Team chose three criteria: the event or idea originated in Europe, expanded across Europe and continues to be relevant today. Based on these criteria, the project team distilled six themes with a large number of topics and sub-topics. Here and there, the permanent exhibition goes beyond the outer borders of the European Union.

European history might be complex, diverse and fragmented, but it has a large number of wide-ranging commonalities and widely-shared experiences; displaying some of these is the purpose of the permanent exhibition. Beginning with the ancient myth of "Europa and the Bull" and its changing interpretations, the exhibition highlights key factors of Europe's heritage, which have shaped it deeply, with effects that are still visible today.

## **Does the House of European History aim to create a European identity?**

The notion of identity is one of the most debated in the field of cultural studies. In association with the activities of museums, it has given rise to a vast ensemble of literature and reflection. There is no commonly agreed definition of what a European identity could be. The term is too reductionist and too static to be used as a basis for the House of European History. If the House were to propose a pre-defined concept of European identity this would only hamper debate, rather than creating a many-voiced discussion on this highly interesting and topical question. Instead of giving fixed answers, the House of European History wants to stimulate public discussion of European memory and consciousness.

## **Will the House of European History replace national histories?**

The House of European History will not be a simple sum of national histories, nor does it seek to replace them. The House of European History will be a reservoir of European memory, containing experiences and interpretations in all their diversity, contrasts and contradictions. Its presentation of history will be complex rather than uniform, more differentiated than homogeneous, critical rather than affirmative, but it will focus on the emergence of the European Community.

## **At what point does the narrative start?**

The permanent exhibition in the House of European History, the centrepiece of the new museum, will focus on European history from the 19th century to the present day. In some parts, the presentation goes further back in history, reaching back to ancient times and the Middle Ages, in order to explain fundamental characteristics of European culture and civilisation, thus enabling visitors to gain a better understanding of the present.

The permanent exhibition starts with a presentation of the myth of Europa, the change of geographical concepts throughout history and a reflection on what European heritage might be. The exhibition concentrates on the European history of the 19th and 20th centuries, with a special focus on the history of European integration.

## **Is there a risk of overlapping with the Parlamentarium, which also shows the history of European Integration?**

The Parlamentarium, or European Parliament's visitors' centre, deals with the role, functioning and the activities of the European Parliament. The House of European History, by contrast, is a museum on European history in a much wider sense. The subject matters

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of the two are different, defined by very different contexts, goals, missions and tools. The House of European History takes a much broader approach to history and - as a museum - places objects, as testimonies of history, at the centre of interest. The two projects are complementary.

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## Information from the architects

**The building was converted and enlarged by the international consortium Atelier d'architecture Chaix & Morel & associés (FR), JSWD Architekten (DE), and TPF (BE).**

The new museum occupies the Georges Eastman building located in the heart of the Léopold Park in Brussels. To meet the needs of the entire programme, it was necessary to double the building's surface area. As a result, the project stretches out into the existing courtyard and vertically extends the building. The added three floor levels nevertheless respect and reinforce the composition underlying this early 20th century building which is based on the pre-eminence of the central body and its axial symmetry. By designing a coherent overall grouping, the new structure completes the existing building, taking a form that seems expected and almost familiar.

The glass envelope of the extension provides a reading of its contents, expressed by opaque prisms that seemingly float within this transparent box. The almost abstract positioning of these elements provides a vivid asymmetry that contrasts strongly with the ordered geometry of the existing building. This grouping of singular elements creates a unified and harmonious whole representative of the European ideal. By day, the screen printed glass envelope dominates through its elegant simplicity. By night, the perception inverses, with the envelope seeming to vanish, allowing the interior lighting to reveal the interplay of volumes, solids and voids. The alternation of glazed and opaque surfaces provides a range of scenographic presentation possibilities, such as picture rails, display cases, shelves and projection spaces.

Lying in the centre of the project, an essential architectural element provides the setting from which the museum can be discovered: the atrium and panoramic lifts accompany the visitor's vertical movements, revealing the union between old and new as well as providing an overall view of the museum and its organisation.

Through its quality and strong identity, the new museum affirms its importance in the heart of the European district and provides a new staging post in the discovery of Brussels's cultural circuit.

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## Temporary exhibition in the House of European History - "Interactions"

*"Interactions. Centuries of Commerce, Combat and Creation"* is the House of European History's first temporary exhibition. It will run until 31 May 2018. It illuminates exemplary moments and revealing stories of encounters and exchanges in European history.

The exhibition has been conceived as a participatory experience. Your senses will go on a voyage of discovery - interacting with other visitors, playing games, smelling perfumes, and even listening to fairy tales lying on a bed.

*"Interactions"* contributes to developing the House of European History into a place of meeting and debate, both in Brussels and on the web.

### Connections

The visit starts with the visitor: Which things in our life connect us to other places in and outside of Europe: food, music, sports, business, friends or holiday destinations? Visitors can share their answers online through a website and in the exhibition. Together, their contributions merge into a new map of Europe, showing individual answers in the light of emerging patterns. This map will keep developing as long as the exhibition is open. All contributions can be found back and explored in the exhibition and on the website.

### Encounters

Europeans have constantly been moving and meeting across borders and barriers to exchange goods, fight wars, negotiate agreements and share knowledge. Through a selection of key events and developments in European history, the first part of the exhibition evokes where and how these encounters happened, who were the actors involved and what their experiences were.

First-class objects, games and playful activities enhance the content of this section and turn complex historical processes into fun and memorable experiences.

### Exchange

Although the objects found in this part of the exhibition might look quite familiar and ordinary, each and every one tells a story - often unexpected - of human contact across borders. Products we think come from one particular country or place, such as pizza, croissants, tulips, or eau de Cologne, are actually the result of a blend of different traditions which developed as people, products and ideas travelled across time and space.

Designed as the rooms of a home, this section uses a wide range of audio-visual media and hands-on exhibits to tell surprising stories of travelling thoughts and things in a casual and entertaining way .