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A9-0402/2023

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REPORT

on European historical consciousness
(2023/2112(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

Rapporteur: Sabine Verheyen

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on European historical consciousness (2023/2112(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to its resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/692 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1381/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014³,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 November 2021 on the European Education Area: a shared holistic approach⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2022 on the role of culture, education, media and sport in the fight against racism⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 April 2022 on the implementation of citizenship education actions⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 December 2022 on the implementation of the New European Agenda for Culture and the EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations⁷,
- having regard to its resolution of 21 January 2021 on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality⁸,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 18 September 2020 entitled ‘A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025’ (COM(2020)0565),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 14 June 2016 entitled ‘Supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism’ (COM(2016)0379),
- having regard to the European Cultural Convention of 19 December 1954⁹,

¹ [OJ C 171, 6.5.2021, p. 25.](#)

² [OJ C 137 E, 27.5.2010, p. 25.](#)

³ [OJ L 156, 5.5.2021, p. 1.](#)

⁴ [OJ C 205, 20.5.2022, p. 17.](#)

⁵ [OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 15.](#)

⁶ [OJ C 434, 15.11.2022, p. 31.](#)

⁷ [OJ C 177, 17.5.2023, p. 78.](#)

⁸ [OJ C 456, 10.11.2021, p. 208.](#)

- having regard to the study conducted for its Committee on Culture and Education entitled ‘European Historical Memory: Policies, Challenges and Perspectives’¹⁰,
 - having regard to the study conducted for its Committee on Culture and Education entitled ‘European Identity’¹¹,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A9-0402/2023),
- A. whereas Europe’s complex, conflict-ridden and contested past poses both a challenge and an opportunity for European integration, acknowledging that a well-informed historical consciousness fosters mutual understanding and tolerance;
 - B. whereas gender-, belief- and ethnicity-based injustices have been embedded in European history over many centuries, including in the form of antisemitism and antigypsyism, having consequences for Europe and the rest of the world;
 - C. whereas mindful engagement with history and historical injustices helps to address different forms of intolerance and inequality and build more inclusive societies;
 - D. whereas history must never be relativised, distorted or falsified for political purposes;
 - E. whereas historical negationism and other forms of biased interpretations of history represent a major threat that kindles distrust and conflict between peoples and nations and undermines efforts to nurture historical justice and reconciliation;
 - F. whereas dealing with the past requires utmost impartiality and objectivity both in historical scholarship and the political realm;
 - G. whereas historical memory incorporates a distinct degree of subjectivity, given that the choice of what to remember and how the past is interpreted necessarily involves value judgements;
 - H. whereas while there are ‘historical facts’ grounded in professional historical work, including research, teaching and the preservation of sources and historical sites, there is no single monolithic, indisputable and everlasting ‘historical truth’ that one specific group or nation can monopolise and exclusively claim for itself, or use to negate the existence of other peoples, nations or states;
 - I. whereas interdisciplinary approaches and contextualisation are essential elements for history education, which needs to be associated with European citizenship education as well as exchange and mobility programmes;

⁹ See: <https://rm.coe.int/168006457e>.

¹⁰ [Study – ‘European Historical Memory: Policies, Challenges and Perspectives’ \(second edition\), European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Policy Department B – Structural and Cohesion Policies, April 2015.](#)

¹¹ [Study – ‘European Identity’, European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Policy Department B – Structural and Cohesion Policies, April 2017.](#)

- J. whereas fostering a critical historical consciousness across borders by educational and other means is central for Europeans to be able to understand and come to terms with their past, confidently deal with the present and work towards a common future;
- K. whereas European historical consciousness is understood as an individual as well as collective ability and skill to understand, critically assess and reflectively learn from history, which facilitates the recognition of the inextricable connection and interdependency between past, present and future;

Dealing with Europe's past as a risk and an opportunity

- 1. Acknowledges that the diverse and often conflicting histories of European nations and states make any effort to deal with history at a political level a difficult and potentially dangerous endeavour, and that attempts to steer how to commemorate and interpret the past always prove to be challenging;
- 2. Emphasises the potential of the principle of *historia magistra vitae* and considers especially the tragic periods and dark elements of Europe's history not only to be a vigorous reminder of past mistakes whose repetition is to be avoided, but also as a call to work jointly towards democratic and inclusive societies in the Union and globally;
- 3. Considers a responsible, evidence-based and critical approach to history, focusing on common European values, to be a *sine qua non* for any democratic body politic, in order to sensitise current and future generations for achievements and aberrations of the past alike, strengthen a self-reflective public discourse and foster understanding and reconciliation within and among particular social groups, nations and states;

Politics of the past in the European Union – a critical assessment

- 4. Stresses the need for an honest assessment of the EU's 'politics of the past', through which it has striven to add legitimacy to the European project, strengthen a European sense of belonging and foster the peaceful coexistence of the continent's peoples, by equally acknowledging achievements and existing shortcomings, and by scrutinising the ways in which citizens have been encouraged to engage with the past;
- 5. Acknowledges the array of past and present initiatives at European level to foster a common European historical memory, including the Holocaust Remembrance Day, the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of all Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes, the establishment of a dedicated remembrance strand in the former Europe for Citizens and current Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programmes, and various Parliament resolutions such as those of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism and of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe;
- 6. Expresses its concern that there continues to be a latent competition and partial incompatibility between different memory frames and remembrance cultures in Europe, including between Western and Eastern Europe, but also between countries and nations within certain parts of the continent; stresses that all European countries have concurring and diverging experiences alike that belong to a shared European history; acknowledges the crimes committed by Nazi, fascist and communist totalitarian regimes

as well as under colonialism, and the role these crimes have played in shaping historical perceptions in Europe; emphasises the need to bridge existing regional and ideological divides in historical awareness among European countries and peoples with a view to building a common ground for dialogue as well as mutual understanding and respect;

7. Recognises that the horrors of the past serve as a ‘negative foundation myth’ and provide a strong sense of purpose for the European peace project, yet acknowledges that the Union’s concern mainly with narrating a story about itself *ex negativo* bears the risk of nurturing a teleological and simplistic black-and-white scheme of history which potentially hampers a fully informed understanding of Europe’s intricate past and reduces incentives to challenge stereotypes and sacred cows of national histories;

Towards an informed historical consciousness in Europe

8. Recognises the need for a broader and more holistic understanding of European history for a critical and self-reflective European historical consciousness to emerge, in particular by widening the focus of current European remembrance initiatives, taking into due account also groups that have been underrepresented so far, and by promoting innovative ways of teaching history;
9. Stresses the importance of moving away from a European ‘remembrance culture’ that is predominantly top-down and concerned with defining what Europeans should remember towards a bottom-up and citizens-driven ‘culture of remembering’ based on common European principles and values, concentrating on developing capacities for a critical reworking of the past at local, regional, national and European levels, involving civil-society organisations;
10. Acknowledges the crucial importance of approaching Europe’s past on the basis of the European core values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and the ethical and philosophical traditions that underpin these values, and of creating an open sphere of discussion that also makes it possible to address difficult elements of national histories and that provides for mutual understanding and reconciliation both within and between European nations, as well as between European nations and the rest of the world;
11. Considers the freedom to teach, study and conduct research, including free access to archives and sources, alongside free artistic expression, to be a prerequisite for the generation and dissemination of unbiased and evidence-based knowledge in democratic societies, and for a critical dealing with history in particular; calls on the Commission and the Member States to safeguard those freedoms that are currently at risk, especially due to cases of misappropriation of memory laws, including by means of the EU’s rule of law mechanism;
12. Stresses the vital role of education and calls on the Member States to update current curricula and teaching methodologies with a view to shifting focus from national towards European and global history and in order to allow for more emphasis on a supranational historical understanding, in particular by allowing for multiple perspectives on history and by fostering corresponding teaching styles that favour reflection and discussion over knowledge transfer and that are guided by the overall objective of making students learn ‘how to think’ rather than ‘what to think’;

13. Underscores the vital importance of learning about European integration, the history, institutions and fundamental values of the Union and European citizenship for a European sense of belonging to emerge; calls for the teaching of European history and European integration, which needs to be regarded in a global context, and for European citizenship education to become an integral part of national education systems; acknowledges efforts made at EU level to improve knowledge about the Union and its history, including the so-called Jean Monnet actions; calls on the Commission and the Member States to work, including through the European Education Area's Working Group on Equality and Values, on deliverables that address specifically the development of European historical consciousness, and to jointly develop an 'EU manual' in curricular activities providing common guidelines and impartial facts and figures for the teaching of European history;
14. Considers chauvinism, gender-stereotypes, power-asymmetries and structural inequalities to be deeply rooted in European history, and regrets the lack of a sufficiently multicultural and gender-sensitive approach in the teaching of history; deems it vital to address the marginalisation of women and other underrepresented societal groups in history, and calls on the Member States to provide for a stronger corresponding focus in national curricula;
15. Stresses the need for interdisciplinary and intersectional history teaching that applies innovative and learner-centred pedagogy such as interactive, storytelling and lessons-learned approaches for all generations, makes use of a comprehensive set of sources, technologies and learning materials, including cross-border and transnational history textbooks and oral histories, and promotes analytical and critical-thinking skills;
16. Recognises the central role played by teachers in the generation and transmission of competencies required to understand and critically assess historical facts, and emphasises the importance of teachers not only receiving adequate training but also engaging in continuous professional development, including peer-learning activities and the sharing of best practices both at national and transnational level; underlines, in this context, the added value of the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies;
17. Calls on the Member States to provide tailor-made (history) teaching materials and training that enables teachers to better focus on transnational aspects and the multifacetedness of history, imparts adequate didactics and principles of modern teaching and is primarily concerned with forming self-reflective young people;
18. Emphasises that there is great value in collecting data and comparing and evaluating methods and tools for teaching history, and welcomes the work of both specialised governmental and non-governmental organisations active in this area, including the Council of Europe's Observatory on History Teaching in Europe and EUROCLIO; stresses the need for more EU Member States to participate in the Observatory;
19. Acknowledges the potential of museums critically addressing Europe's contested history as a tool for learning about the past and building historical awareness, in particular the 'House of European History' as a flagship project for which sufficient resources should be made available in order to ensure wider outreach to the European public;

20. Stresses the importance of preserving Europe's rich cultural and historical heritage and memorial sites, in particular as a means for establishing a critical historical consciousness, provided they are not abused for ideological purposes, and highlights the role that the European Heritage Label and independent institutions promoting European heritage, both tangible and intangible, can play in this regard; encourages the Member States to step up their efforts to define and protect places of democratic memory, especially those related to underrepresented groups; emphasises the potential of Europeana in serving as Europe's digital library, archive, museum and education platform;
21. Acknowledges the potential of digital media and the rising level of digitalisation in education, while expressing its deep concern about digital channels being increasingly abused for political manipulation and the circulation of disinformation, including concerning history, as highlighted by Russian historical revisionism accompanying Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; calls on the Commission and the Member States to step up their efforts to strengthen media and digital literacy and to endow teachers and students with adequate skills and tools facilitating fact-based history teaching, and enabling them to identify, contextualise and analyse traditional as well as modern historical sources;
22. Stresses that learning mobility opportunities across borders provided by European programmes and other mobility schemes favour the exchange of ideas and promote transversal knowledge as well as intercultural understanding, helping to break down national barriers and providing a better understanding of past and present;
23. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen the tools currently available at European level in order to foster a critical and self-reflective European historical consciousness, in particular the Erasmus+ programme, which supports mobility and intercultural learning as key tools to increase understanding of other cultures and nations, and the CERV programme, which provides support for transnational historical remembrance projects and promotes civic engagement;
24. Requests that the European institutions, the Member States, candidate and prospective candidate countries, educational institutions and civil-society actors step up their efforts to foster reconciliation, abstain from any attempt to instrumentalise history for political purposes, and fight historical revisionism and denialism both in the European Union and beyond; recalls the importance of these aspects for future enlargements of the Union;

Outlook: the legacy of the past and the EU's future

25. Espouses the ideal of a 'culture of remembering' and historical consciousness based on shared European values and practices in approaching the past, yet at the same time avoiding any undue levelling or simplification of history;
26. Expresses its hope that on the basis of critical self-reflection relating to history and historical responsibility at national level, a truly European reflective discourse on the continent's past may emerge, with history not being abused for power-political purposes, and expresses its hope that a 'community of destiny' among European peoples will emerge from common historical work;

27. Envisions collective memories eventually contributing to and merging into a European public sphere, with diverging remembrance cultures complementing each other rather than being in competition, and dealings with history becoming an issue of civic rather than political action;

◦

◦ ◦

28. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

This report¹ is largely based upon the findings of two studies requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education titled "European Historical Memory: Policies, Challenges and Perspectives" and "European Identity",² and puts the concept of 'historical consciousness' into its focus.

The fundamental value of 'historical consciousness' emerges from the underlying assumption that the knowledge of history is not only a value in itself, but informs our understanding of the present and additionally guides us in our attempts to shape the future.

Indeed, historical consciousness helps us interpret the past, but it also assists us in our understanding of who we are, and where we are positioned in time. In other words, historical consciousness does not only assist in developing a sensitivity towards and an understanding of the past, but also increases a self-awareness of ourselves, as Europeans in relation to history.

A critical review of the past should not be limited, however, to emphasising the victims of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes; it should reassess all dark sides of European history, including colonialism, racism, violations of human rights and gender-based historical injustices.

With this in mind, the present report of the European Parliament on "European historical consciousness" is structured in four parts:

- The first part (*Dealing with Europe's past as a risk and an opportunity*) acknowledges the importance of dealing with history in a responsible and critical way as a *sine qua non*, as an intrinsic need to learn from our past.
- The second part (*Politics of the past in the European Union – a critical assessment*) underlines the danger of nurturing a teleological and simplistic narrative of history in which the horrors of the past serve as a 'negative foundation myth' for European integration.
- The third part (*Towards an informed historical consciousness in Europe*) seeks a well-informed historical consciousness in Europe and outlines possible avenues that will achieve this objective.
- The fourth and last part (*Outlook: the legacy of the past and the EU's future*) embraces the idea of a new 'culture of remembering' that nurtures historical consciousness based on shared European values and practices.

¹ The explanatory statement accompanying this report of the Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education was slightly revised following the vote in committee on 28 November 2023 and the withdrawal of the originally appointed Rapporteur.

² Prutsch, Markus J. (2015 [2nd edition]). *European Historical Memory: Policies, Challenges and Perspectives*. Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union; Prutsch, Markus J. (2017). *European Identity*. Brussels: European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union.

1. Dealing with Europe's past as a risk and an opportunity

As Jacques Delors correctly recalled on several occasions, European citizens “cannot fall in love with the single market” (1989).³ In order to develop a sense of a common belonging, work on collective memory is indispensable, since collective memory is a central aspect of group identity being formed and strengthened.

There is not, however, one particular European collective memory. The memories of the nations and peoples that compose the EU are filled with wars, conflicts and disputes. For the formation of a collective memory, we therefore need to indulge in a process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (‘coming to terms with/working on the past’), notably to redress the past in a critical and meaningful way both at Member States and EU level.

2. Politics of the past in the European Union – a critical assessment

In historical perspectives, we should not consider Europe as a homogeneous civilisation and geopolitical space, as Norbert Elias observed even in 1939.⁴ What must be the ultimate aim of European memory policies is not to develop an imagined sense of a shared past, but to have a clear direction for the future of the EU and to strengthen a common sense of European belonging.

Giorgio Agamben rightly asserts that if the idea of Europe has any meaning, it consists of the fact that Europeans “can gain access to their truth only by means of confrontation with the past, only by settling accounts with their history”.⁵

Undoubtedly, the EU has made conscious efforts to deal with Europe's difficult past(s); it is involved in undertaking memory work and dedicates substantial resources to that aim.

While the past is often referenced in official EU discourses, these ‘difficult pasts’ have as yet not been addressed, however, at European level in a sufficiently broad and reflective manner.

3. Towards an informed historical consciousness in Europe

The path towards an informed historical consciousness in Europe starts with avoiding building European collective memory solely on one single negative foundation myth, since this hinders the critical examination of the past.

The European Union is a community of destiny (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*), and it should be understood as such and not as a community of one shared collective memory. This is how the ‘historical journey’ of Europeans needs to be seen.

Here lies the importance of historical consciousness: it is an adequate tool that helps us to conceptualise how we comprehend and relate to history; it helps to acknowledge the historicity of our circumstances. In other words, it assists in developing an ability to interpret

³ Delors, Jacques (1989). *Statement on the broad lines of Commission policy presented by Jacques Delors, President of the Commission, to the European Parliament and reply to the ensuing Parliamentary debate*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities (Bulletin of the European Communities; Supplement 1/89), p. 6.

⁴ See Elias, Norbert (1939). *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation* (2 vols.). Basel: Verlag Haus zum Falken.

⁵ Agamben, Giorgio (2019 [1942]). *Creation and Anarchy: the Work of Art and the Religion of Capitalism* (translated by Adam Kotsko). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 8.

and recognise the past in the form of history. Historical consciousness enhances the ability to utilise experiences and to make sense of contemporary situations and identifications⁶. ‘History’ is not the sum of past facts, but it is the meaning produced after conceptualising and working through the facts. Arguably, history is ‘self-knowledge’.

4. Outlook: the legacy of the past and the EU’s future

Memory work at EU level must not be used as a form of soft power to express political positions or defend political interests. Rather, thinking about and working with history is a form of orientation in relation to the present and the future⁷. Hence, the main purpose of studying history should be the formation of historical consciousness as both a collective and individual capacity.

Overall, the report espouses the ideal of a ‘culture of remembering’ and historical consciousness that is based on shared European values and practices in approaching the past, yet at the same time avoids any simplification of history.

⁶ Popa, Nathalie (2023). “How Meaning Making Cultivates Historical Consciousness: Identifying a Learning Trajectory and Pedagogical Guidelines to Promote It”. In: *The Social Studies* 114:4, pp. 139-159, here p. 142f.

⁷ Nordgren, Kenneth (2019). “Boundaries of Historical Consciousness: a Western Cultural Achievement or an Anthropological Universal”. In: *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 51:6, pp. 779-797, here p. 791.

**ANNEX: ENTITIES OR PERSONS
FROM WHOM THE RAPPORTEUR HAS RECEIVED INPUT**

The rapporteur declares under her exclusive responsibility that she did not receive input from any entity or person to be mentioned in this Annex pursuant to Article 8 of Annex I to the Rules of Procedure. Following the withdrawal of the Rapporteur, the Chair of the Committee took over as Rapporteur on 28/11/2023.

Entity and/or person
N/A.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	28.11.2023
Result of final vote	+ : 19 - : 7 0 : 1
Members present for the final vote	Asim Ademov, Andrea Bocskor, Ilana Cicurel, Laurence Farreng, Tomasz Frankowski, Catherine Griset, Sylvie Guillaume, Hannes Heide, Irena Joveva, Petra Kammerevert, Niyazi Kizilyürek, Niklas Nienaß, Rob Rooker, Marcos Ros Sempere, Monica Semedo, Andrey Slabakov, Michaela Šojdrová, Sabine Verheyen, Theodoros Zagorakis, Milan Zver
Substitutes present for the final vote	João Albuquerque, Ibán García Del Blanco, Chiara Gemma, Łukasz Kohut, Marcel Kolaja, Emmanuel Maurel, Wolfram Pirchner

**FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL
IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE**

19	+
PPE	Ademov Asim, Frankowski Tomasz, Pirchner Wolfram, Sojdrová Michaela, Verheyen Sabine, Zagorakis Theodoros
Renew	Cicurel Ilana, Farreng Laurence, Joveva Irena, Semedo Monica
S&D	Albuquerque João, García Del Blanco Ibán, Guillaume Sylvie, Heide Hannes, Kammerevert Petra, Kohut Lukasz, Ros Sempere Marcos
Verts/ALE	Kolaja Marcel, Nienaß Niklas

7	-
ECR	Gemma Chiara, Rooker Rob, Slabakov Andrey
ID	Griset Catherine
NI	Bocskor Andrea
The Left	Kizilyürek Niyazi, Maurel Emmanuel

1	0
PPE	Zver Milan

Key:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstentions