DRAFT REPORT

on historical memory in culture and education in the European Union (2013/2129(INI))

Committee on Culture and Education

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on historical memory in culture and education in the European Union
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The European Parliament,

– having regard to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

– having regard to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 260 (III) A of 9 December 1948 on Genocide,

– having regard to Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law1,

– having regard to the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism of 3 June 2008,

– having regard to Resolution 1481 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 26 January 2006 on the need for international condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian Communist regimes,

– having regard to Recommendation Rec(2001)15 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on history teaching in twenty-first-century Europe,

– having regard to its declaration on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, adopted on 23 September 20082,

– having regard to its resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism3,

– having regard to the Warsaw Declaration of 23 August 2011 on the occasion of the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Totalitarian Regimes,

– having regard to the ‘Europe for Citizens’ programme 2014-2020,

– having regard to the statement of 10 May 2011 by the Reconciliation of European Histories group on so-called ‘Polish concentration camps’,

– having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Culture and Education (A7-0000/2013),

A. whereas the history of Europe is inextricably linked with tragedy and the experience of various forms of totalitarianism, such as Communism, National Socialism, Fascism and

other criminal systems which brought death and unimaginable suffering to millions of Europeans;

B. whereas the European Union was constructed against the backdrop of the trauma brought about by two all-powerful totalitarianism systems: National Socialism and Communism, which, although they differed in ideology and form, were both characterised by brutality and claimed the lives of millions; whereas it is inappropriate to argue that one was better or worse than the other; and whereas united Europe is founded on the basis of Judaeo-Christian ethics, Greek aesthetics and Roman law;

C. whereas for many European countries the end of the Second World War did not lead to full freedom; whereas for many years after the war Europe was divided, and its central and eastern parts not fully liberated until after 1989, when the opportunity presented itself for genuine integration across the entire continent;

D. whereas the trauma of 1939-45 must not be allowed to be repeated, and in that regard remembering and accurately portraying the past is of vital importance; whereas, also, the acceptance of historical lies or the denial of difficult episodes in history can lead to xenophobia and hatred; whereas the claim made for many years that the Katyń massacre was a German crime is a classic example of a historical lie;

E. whereas education plays a key role in understanding history and promoting historical truth, especially among young people, whose knowledge of history often comes solely from electronic media;

F. whereas culture is a universal and easily accessible carrier of historical memory and content influencing Europeans’ awareness and facilitating an understanding of dark episodes in the past; whereas, also, history is a huge source of inspiration for artists and culture-makers;

G. whereas the temptation can exist to use culture, particularly film and literature, for propaganda purposes, falsifying history and presenting inaccurate interpretations of historical events;

H. whereas non-governmental organisations and the voluntary sector play a major role in documenting and uncovering the truth of totalitarian crimes;

I. whereas the presentation and teaching of history should be based not on political interpretation but on solid research work; whereas the full opening up of historical archives will make it possible to carry out diligent research and to verify ‘historical lies’;

J. whereas the creation of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience is an essential step on the road to genuine reconciliation among European nations, and whereas EU financial support is essential for this project to achieve its mission;

K. whereas an extremely important role is played by European programmes and funds intended for the teaching of history, historical cultural projects and exchanges of experience among European citizens, for example by funding historical research and
developing cross-border and transnational educational and cultural programmes;

1. Strongly condemns all crimes against humanity and the totalitarian regimes which left a bloody stain on our history;

2. Pays tribute to all the heroes, known and unknown, who, acting out of a profound sense of humanism and faithfulness to their values, opposed the totalitarian regimes and demonstrated their humanity, often paying with their own lives;

3. Acknowledges the sovereign role and position of the Member States in designing their own teaching programmes; calls, at the same time, for selective memory to be avoided when these programmes are drawn up and condemns an instrumental approach to history and its political interpretation;

4. Points out that it is unacceptable to apply double standards when assessing and critically analysing Communism and National Socialism;

5. Notes that all countries implement their own history policy, which helps to build a sense of national identity, but which, in combination with ignorance and selective memory, can sometimes lead to falsifications of history that are dangerous and hurtful to victims and their families, as is the case when referring to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Nazi German concentration camp in occupied Poland, as a ‘Polish death camp’;

6. Considers that historical truth and memory, nurtured among other things by educational activities and cultural events, will reinforce genuine reconciliation between nations and authentic European integration based on truth;

7. Supports the proposal for a Platform of European Memory and Conscience, the aim of which is to establish an international judicial body to deal with the most serious crimes of the Communist dictators;

8. Calls on Member States to support ambitious history teaching programmes which do not gloss over the most difficult episodes; recognises that Member States have complete autonomy as regards the content of their teaching syllabuses;

9. Notes that modern media can play a vital role in promoting historical truth, both by accurately portraying historical events and by granting appropriate funding to historical productions and educational history programmes;

10. Stresses the importance of EU funds in promoting historical memory; notes that such funds should be used for projects linked to history education, promotion, research, archiving and digitisation;

11. Deplores the planned reduction in funds for the ‘Europe for Citizens’ programme, and calls on the Commission to guarantee funding for national and transnational educational and cultural projects which raise awareness of the darker episodes in Europe’s history;

12. Stresses that the European Union should support cooperation between institutes and organisations which foster historical memory, and in this context calls on the Commission
to ensure financial support for professional historical research to form the basis for future educational and cultural projects; calls for historical archives to be fully opened up to research historians;

13. Supports citizens’ initiatives and non-governmental organisations, including those outside the EU, which are actively engaged in researching the history of nations and gathering documents on the crimes committed under totalitarianism, and supports transnational partnerships and networks with the aim of promoting mutual relations between EU citizens; supports, in that context, cooperation between Member States and countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy;

14. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, and to governments and parliaments of the Member-States.
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Historical memory forms the basis for the identity of the European Union and the countries it comprises. Historical truth and reconciliation between nations should be the cornerstones on which international and EU cooperation is built. Europe’s cruel history, with its wars, totalitarianism regimes and conflicts between nations, sometimes leads to attempts to create a new history which disregards inconvenient facts. Such attempts give a false perception of relations between nations. On the other hand, Europeans have created a unique project of peaceful partnership and cooperation. Our current and future relations should be free from lies and selective memory about painful events in relations between EU Member States because peaceful cooperation and collaboration can only be successfully achieved by building on the truth.

Citizens’ identity can be built on historical truth, free of falsehoods and particularistic political interpretations. Genuine reconciliation between nations can be achieved through awareness of one’s own history and of the history of one’s neighbours and other countries. Culture and education play a significant role in the process of reconciliation; together with history they form a triangle that shapes the consciousness of generations. Various cultural events and educational activities, including those financed with EU funds under the ‘Europe for Citizens’ programme, help to foster European cooperation and strengthen reconciliation between the nations of Europe.

For culture and its creators, history is a huge source of inspiration, and the true, often forgotten, histories of nations or individuals speak of both the greatness and the baseness of mankind. Cultural creators have never shied away from tackling difficult subjects – through their work they have been able to impact on the consciousness of European citizens. There have also been cases where culture has been used for propaganda purposes, where history has been exploited and a false picture of events presented for particularistic political objectives. Given the powerful impact which culture can have, people and organisations wishing to ‘expropriate’ history and memory will always be tempted to use it to serve their own ends. Hence the importance of countries cooperating in order to elucidate conflicting interpretations of history, and of archives being completely open so that facts can be properly verified.

Funding provided through EU funds could promote awareness of many previously unknown events and personalities that could serve as an example and inspire many generations of Europeans. In theatre, literature and cinema we can appreciate the major role of historical truth in inspiring artists whose work, despite tackling difficult subjects, helps Europeans to understand difficult and hitherto neglected subjects. Addressing these issues and reflecting on their progression and consequences can give hope for a better understanding of history and the removal from public debate of false interpretations, thus leading to a deeper reconciliation between nations based on historical truth.

In the process of reconciliation between nations, historical education is vital to understanding contemporary Europe. Member States have a sovereign role and position in designing their own syllabuses. The European funds available to them under, for example, the ‘Europe for
Citizens’ programme, provide support for education at every level – from school education to lifelong learning initiatives. A major role in this process is played by non-governmental organisations and citizens’ initiatives, in particular by researching and collecting documents relating to the crimes of totalitarian regimes, and then using that knowledge to conduct educational projects. The European Union should support such initiatives and provide financial instruments to ensure that historical research is conducted professionally and that the results are published. The results of that work will form the basis for cross-border and transnational educational and cultural programmes, and ultimately for relations based on truth. Historical truth in education can also prevent the growth of nationalism and xenophobia – there is nothing more likely to encourage such phenomena to grow than pages in history which are left unexplained or are falsified.

The promotion, by both the Commission and the Member States, of ambitious history teaching projects based on historical truth which is scientifically verified should be a standard part of modern education. Support from the EU institutions must, however, always take into account the Member States’ independence in creating their own teaching programmes, something which was strongly emphasised in the report.

In the context of the problems connected with the legislative report on ‘Europe for Citizens 2014-2020’, the report on ‘Historical memory in culture and education in the European Union’ is an excellent opportunity to take stock of current activities relating to historical memory in the areas of education and culture. The creation of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience shows European politicians’ willingness to work to uncover the true history of the nations making up the EU. This is a starting point for further action and for proposing specific ideas in the fields of education and culture, including encouraging reflection, debate and cooperation on memories of the past, international school projects and transnational cultural projects, such as international film and theatre productions.

Transnational cooperation on the subject of historical truth should not be limited solely to cooperation within the EU. It is essential for the EU also to provide support for research initiatives and citizens’ initiatives in countries falling under the European Neighbourhood Policy and neighbouring countries. A full understanding of the history of a nation – often, in the case of countries in the ENP and neighbouring countries, associated with a period of totalitarian dictatorships and crimes committed by them – makes it possible to build a democratic country whose citizens are aware of their difficult history and complicated relations with other countries.

Activities aimed at promoting truth and historical memory and fostering reconciliation between nations can and must be intensified, especially in view of the economic crisis in Europe, which causes dormant or false problems to escalate. Cultural and educational activities can be used to confront the past, and form a foundation on which to build the future and establish full cooperation between nations.