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Remembering the past, making sense of the present, and looking towards the future: The House of European History as the constructor of 'Europe's narrative'

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Declaration

I, Agatha Oostenbrug hereby declare that this thesis, entitled "Remembering the past, making sense of the present, and looking towards the future: The House of European History as the constructor of 'Europe's narrative'", submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

I declare that the written (printed and bound) and the electronic copy of the submitted MA thesis are identical.

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Date 22-07-2018

Abstract

The House of European History (HEH) is a museum in Brussels that addresses the notion of a common European history and memory, and aims to provide its visitors with a "reservoir of European memory" in order for the visitors to reflect and come up with what constitutes a common European history for them. It opened in May 2017, and was an initial idea of the former president of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering. Before and after its opening, the museum was met with widespread criticism, mainly for its 55 million euro price-tag, but also for its supposed political agenda. However, the museum enjoys a high level of academic independence, and therefore its meaning goes deeper than that of a mere political tool. The HEH makes an interesting subject of research, as it opened very recently, and therefore it is still fairly unexplored.

This thesis researches the narrative that the HEH constructs and presents in its permanent exhibition, by looking at two focus points: (i) the differing histories of Central and Eastern Europe opposed to Western Europe in a post-WWII setting; and (ii) the history of European integration in the twentieth century. The research draws on fieldwork done in January and April 2018, as well as qualitative analysis of secondary literature, with influences from museum studies and public history. The research is placed in a theoretical framework of history and memory studies, and it puts these notions in a European context.

As became clear from the research, the HEH includes Central and Eastern European histories as well as their Western counterpart, mostly juxtaposing, comparing and contrasting them as in not to treat them in their respective national histories but in a pan-European setting. Regarding European integration, the museum chose an approach in the form of 'milestones', events that were significant for the process of European integration, displayed in glass columns throughout the floors of the exhibition, respective of their historical context. The thesis concludes with the statement that the narrative the museum constructs means something in itself: the museum has provided a concrete space with tangible objects to represent a common European history and memory, and consequently an abstract space is created as well, in which this notion can be substantiated or refuted.

Keywords: House of European History – memory – European narrative – European history – Public History

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Preface

This thesis has been written as a part of the master 'Euroculture: Society, Politics and Culture in a Global Context' (2016-2018). In order to write this thesis, I have visited the House of European History in Brussels three times in two visits; all of them I have enjoyed greatly.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank curator Joanna Urbanek for taking the time to lead me through the exhibition, and to provide answers to my questions. Also, I would like to thank Museum Director Constanze Itzel for kindly receiving me to discuss the museum.

I want to thank my supervisors for their enthusiasm about the topic, and for the feedback that they provided throughout the semester.

Last but not least, I want to thank Constantinos Lapadakis for his patience, input, and critical proofreading. As my companion for the first visit to the museum in January 2018, his view was highly valuable to me and provided topics for discussions which undoubtedly enriched this thesis.

Introduction

Since the 1950s, the European Union (EU) has greatly developed from a political and economic collaboration to a broader entity, extending to cultural fields, and even supporting initiatives to instill a European identity in its citizens. The historical context that surrounds this process of convergence is an important aspect to be acquainted with in order to understand the EU today. One of the initiatives coming from the EU to educate and animate Europeans in order to legitimate its body and to increase citizen's participation, is the House of European History in Brussels. However, the museum does not only pursue a political goal, as its team has a high level of academic independence.

The House of European History (HEH) opened its doors in May 2017 with the purpose of providing "a permanent source for the interpretation of Europe's past – a reservoir of European memory."[1] European history, from the French Revolution on until today, is told and displayed in the permanent exhibition of the museum, which is spread out over five floors of the Eastman Building in the Leopold Park in Brussels. However, the task of displaying a converging European history in a museum is highly complex, as first it has to be defined what belongs to it and what does not, and it has to be determined how the events should be presented. The rich mosaic of European peoples, experiences, cultures, and histories is embedded in the centred sculpture 'Vortex of History', extending its way from the stairwell through all floors of the museum. This is a 25 meter high twisting and twirling artwork made up of letters that merge into words and quotes marking significant moments of European history, representing the European Union's motto 'unity in diversity'.[2] This structure is reminiscent of 'Confluences', a 36 meter high sculpture in the lobby of the European Parliament (EP), made of steel branches that diverge and intertwine, symbolizing the interdependence of Europeans.[3] Whereas 'Vortex of History' represents the historical perspective of Europe, 'Confluences' is more directed to the EU's politics and the cooperation of its member states. As the HEH was an initiative by the former European Parliament (EP) president Hans-Gert Pöttering, ideas deriving both from the academic and the political are involved in the way in which the European narrative is constructed.

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[1] "Mission & Vision," House of European History, accessed 30 November, 2017, https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/mission-vision.

[2] "Curator's notes: The Vortex of History," House of European History, accessed 2 July, 2018, https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/focus/curators-notes-vortex-history ; "Sculpture for the House of European History," Todomuta Studio, accessed 2 July, 2018, http://www.todomuta.com/sculpture_dossier.pdf.

[3] "Confluences Sculpture at the European Parliament in Brussels," Multimedia Centre European Parliament, accessed 2 July, 2018, https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/confluences-sculpture-at-european-parliament-in-brussels_19991200_023_007_p.

The aim of this thesis is not to provide answers to complex (or maybe impossible to answer) questions such as whether there exists a common European history and memory, or how these notions should be addressed in the public sphere. The main research question is the following: how does the House of European History construct and present a European narrative in its permanent exhibition? Furthermore, considering the number and variety of the different objects one can find in the HEH, all reflecting multiple dimensions of Europe's course over the years, the focus of the present analysis will lie on two aspects of European history that hold a prominent place in the draw up and execution of the permanent exhibition: (i) the histories of Central and Eastern Europe opposed to Western Europe in a post-WWII setting; and (ii) the history of European integration in the twentieth century.

In order to answer the research question, the first chapter discusses the important notions of history and memory, and introduces the debates in which these terms are prevalent in relation to Europe and to the HEH. The second chapter introduces the reader to the HEH by giving an overview of how the museum came into existence and how it is structured today. In addition, to understand how the museum's narrative is constructed, it is important to have an idea of who are the people behind the museum. Next, the third chapter takes the reader through the permanent exhibition in a chronological order, and gives an impression of the exhibition, emphasising more the focus points of this thesis, and introducing the debates that surround them. The fourth chapter deals with public opinion of the museum after its opening. Then, the fifth chapter provides a deeper analysis of the permanent exhibition while presenting a more critical and personal view. Lastly, the conclusion gives an overview of the findings of this research, and aims to answer its research question.

Methodology

This research is empirically driven and based on qualitative analysis, fieldwork, and discourse analysis. In order to be able to answer the research question in this thesis, an in-depth analysis of the House of European History is necessary. As an exploratory case-study, this research functions to help identify doubts and queries that can be the base for further research. A constructivist approach is taken on in the sense that this research looks at the construction and depiction of a European common history and what role it plays (or aspires to play) in the lives of Europeans. How does the HEH see a common European history and how does it construct its narrative in the museum? The research shows the complexity of views regarding concepts such as a 'common European history', 'European memory', and 'European narrative', and tries

to make sense of these meanings in relation to the museum. One has to take into account that a 'European narrative' is different than a 'European Union narrative'. Constructivism allows the research to go beyond the mere analysis of the permanent exhibition, and takes into account the human actors that surround the exhibition, since the outcome of the HEH project highly depends on factors related to its constructors, such as nationality, political preference, and education.

One of the main methods used for gathering information was research in the form of fieldwork. The geographic accessibility of the HEH was very important in this case, allowing and assisting in the conduct of this fieldwork. In the exhibition I looked at how the two focus points – Central and Eastern European history opposed to Western European history; and European integration in the twentieth century – are depicted, and subsequently interpret their meaning in the context of the European narrative. The first focus point needs a bit of explanation.

An important reason for the focus point on Central and Eastern European history, is the fact that "[t]he West/East divide constitutes the fundamental division in the historical representation of Europe."[4] In the second half of the twentieth century, eastern and western Europe were physically divided by the Iron Curtain, while they were influenced by different political regimes. The 'return to Europe' that followed was not a mere political drive, but had a deeper, cultural meaning as well, as Czech writer Milan Kundera wrote in his famous essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe".[5] The memory of Central and Eastern Europe has made efforts in the last decades to establish itself more firmly and prominently on the European level. Especially after the 2004 accession round, the opportunity was provided for a newly developed approach towards European history and memory. One example of this discussion and of the achievement of Central and Eastern European memory is the 'Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism' from April 2009. The debates that preceded the signing of this resolution give an interesting insight into how this topic was treated in an institutional setting: the Resolution meant a breach in the singularity of the Holocaust as the main horror of the twentieth century in Europe. The House of European History is an embodiment of the debate about the inclusion of certain European memories, as it provides a narrative supported by tangible objects, and therefore this paper looks at how Central and Eastern history and memory is included in its permanent exhibition, with special focus on totalitarianism.

The fieldwork for this paper is largely based on the research framework of Stephanie Moser to the capacity of knowledge-making of museums. The results of my fieldwork cannot

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[4] Stuart Woolf, "Europe and its Historians," *Contemporary European History* 12, no.3 (2003), 329.
[5] Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *New York Review of Books* 31, no. 7 (1984).

speak for themselves and therefore have to be described and interpreted. In this research I use qualitative analysis in order to come to a conclusion that enables me to understand the meaning of representation of the narrative of the HEH. This approach allows me to go beyond the formal reality of the HEH, and explains the underlying motives of the (build up to) the exhibited narrative. By means of inductive reasoning I generate meanings from the data collected, which will lead me to the conclusion of this research. As the study to the permanent exhibition of the HEH is a very new field to explore, this case-study allows for additional research to come later.

The fieldwork of this research took place in January and April 2018 with the objective to observe the permanent exhibition the museums holds. The research data of this thesis consists of objects, images, and media guide information in the permanent exhibition of the House of European History, as well as the information provided on its website and booklets. Moreover, I met with Joanna Urbanek, member of the curatorial team, as well as with the Museum Director, Constanze Itzel, to discuss further questions I had after having visited the museum several times. In my fieldwork, the main aim was to establish what was on display and how.

An important element in the debate about a common European history is the critique that it tends to be normalized by Western standards. It was after concerns were raised on the initial conceptual framework of the HEH that a more inclusive plan was made towards Central and Eastern history. I myself come from a Frisian-Dutch background and am thus part of Western Europe. Therefore, I am aware that my ideas and perceptions regarding this research have a certain degree of bias in the sense that my reasoning regarding European history takes place in this Dutch cognitive framework. I strive for a level of detached honesty which acknowledges my own place in the research.

1 Notions of history, memory, and narrative

The subjects of European history, memory and narrative, and what they entail or how they should be dealt with, are complex matters on which no consensus has been, or, as it seems, can be reached. How can one come up with an over-arching story that includes all the peoples of Europe and their histories? Is that desirable? Why is history in a European context important? This chapter focusses on the concepts of history, memory, and narrative. Since these concepts are crucial in the research regarding the existence of the House of European History, their context must be discussed. The chapter starts by examining the concept of history. Next, it goes on with the concepts of memory and collective memory, and then deals with the concept of narrative. Not unimportant is to demonstrate these concept's position in a European context.

1.1 History: connecting the past with the present

History is an important element in the self-awareness of a society, while on a personal level, to know our own past such as where we come from through for instance family histories, can give insight to who we are today. The existential value that people attribute to history can be seen in the influence of works such as *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley in 1976, a book that became the reason for many Americans to trace back their own heritage. In such occasions history stops being a sterile narration of events, but functions in a way that connects the individual with his or her past while giving meaning to the present. The importance of this connection can be seen in the book *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (1998) where the results and conclusions of an interesting wide-scaled phone survey done in 1994-1995 in the United States are presented. Questions regarding how they used the past in their lives were posed to nearly 1500 Americans. The survey showed that the respondents were most interested in history when it was in relation to their own roots. For them, history and memory had a tightly-knit relationship. It was shown that family stories and the tracing of one's roots are important personal histories that help to understand who we are today. Interesting enough, as far as history classes were concerned, the respondents were less positive. History classes were seen as boring, irrelevant, covering only a selective history, taught by teachers who are not always open to other views. However, they stressed the quality of the

teacher as being crucial in history classes: if the teacher is good and interacts with the class, it can make history alive.[6]

The critique on history classes being taught in a strictly factual way in which students are forced to study dates and happenings of the past, without relating them to the present and explaining how they can be used in the present day context, also comes forward in the book *Why History Matters*. John Tosh uses in this book a variety of examples that illustrate the points he makes about the importance of an adequate understanding of history. This understanding is needed to be able to make sense of the present and to widen our insight into present day's problems, and to possibly come up with a wider range of solutions. In Tosh's words: "To have even a limited awareness of the extent of historical debate is to realise something of the range of available alternatives – alternative ways of understanding and alternative solutions."[7] That being said, it can be stated that to understand the European Union, its politics, economies, and its peoples, is not possible if one does not take into account Europe's history and how it got shaped into the European Union we know today. In that sense, historians are important interpreters of information, and institutions such as the House of European History provide a platform to tackle the concern of public awareness of history.

1.1.1 Historiographic writing on Europe

Writing a common European history, which is more than a mere aggregation of its individual states' histories since it should be understood as a Europe viewed as a unitary whole,[8] has been proven to be difficult and problematic. The definitions of Europe are multiple – Europe as a geographic space, a (variety of) civilization(s), or a recent political-economic entity. The extensiveness of the continent, its peoples, histories, and cultures, is too great to be encapsulated in one cohesive narrative. In addition, the great variety of narratives and events in European history, and the historical debates that come along with them, makes that the interpretation of histories differs, depending on the historian. The choices that historiographers make regarding for instance the time-frame, the geographic focus, and their interpretations, inevitably lead to a delineation of Europe's history, and thus to the exclusion of other narratives that exist.

In the course of writing Europe's history, diverging historiographic interpretations have been made, the most prominent being Eurocentrism. In *Eight Eurocentric Historians* J.M. Blaut

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[6] Roy Rosenzweig & David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 109.
[7] John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 139.
[8] Stuart Woolf, "Europe and its Historians," 325.

identifies and refutes the arguments in European historiographic writing that "*falsely* [favor] Europe or Europeans over other peoples and other places."[9] He reckons four kinds of Eurocentric theory that have been developed to explain that Europe (or mainly the West) grew richer than other places: religion, race, environment, and culture.[10] Blaut argues that Europe's power and wealth surpassed other places because of colonialism, and then mainly the riches taken from the America's. In his words: "Here was an entire hemisphere, North and South America, six times the size of Europe itself, almost emptied of its population by the importation of Old World diseases during the sixteenth century, and immeasurably more accessible to Europeans than to any other civilization."[11]

It is easier to criticize an existing theory than to establish one. For example, when aspiring to write a common European history, over-seas colonialism (and the deriving discussion of post-colonialism) is not a factor that was experienced by all corners of the continent. The age of nationalism and the creation of (nation-)states as a starting point of the writing of a common European history seems more adequate, as this development was wide-spread across the continent. In this age, a positivistic approach to historiography was taken, in the sense that historians "were active participants in the construction and legitimation of their nation states, identifying a thread of continuity in the history of their peoples and territory as if they were destined, in teleological mode, to end up in an independent state."[12]

Nationalism spread across the whole continent but existed always in relation to an 'other'. The decline of the Ottoman Empire gave the opportunity for political and cultural (romantic) resistance in the Balkan states, which eventually led to the independence of states such as Greece. Furthermore, a trend of nationalization of culture made its way across Europe from which many 'invented traditions' stem that are believed to trace back to ancient times, and therefore legitimizing, giving purpose to, and unifying the members of a newly emerged nation-state. The positivistic approach towards historiography underwent a radical turn after the nationalistic clashes of the World Wars. The values and 'rational thinking' that Europe had acquired in the Enlightenment were scrutinized and criticized. Adorno and Horkheimer are prominent scholars in this debate, and in their work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) they developed a counternarrative to the then predominantly positive position towards the

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[9] J.M. Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), 200.
[10] Ibid., 1.
[11] Ibid., 2.
[12] Stuart Woolf, "Europe and its Historians," 324.

Enlightenment and its positive impact on men.[13] When the full horrors of the Holocaust came out after the War, the work of Adorno and Horkheimer could be linked to this event in the form of hyper-rationality in the shape of rigid National Socialist systemization in the extermination of the Jews.

Subsequently, history on Europe as a whole was written "at the worst moments of this prolonged crisis of European civilization – in the latter years of the First World War, in the 1930s as the fascist and Nazi regimes forced the pace, and during the Second World War."[14] Within the elite of anti-fascism, European federalism was a pronounced conviction, and when the first European institutions were set up, a clear teleological view of European history came to the fore.[15] The history of Europe was read to lead to the construction of a united Europe in the future.[16] In 1952, the Council of Europe requested a handful historians and intellectuals to come to Rome to discuss a new and unified history of Europe.[17] Consequently, in 1957 a report by Max Beloff called *Europe and the Europeans: An International Discussion* was published. Beloff stated that the research should be approached "as a contribution towards deciding as to the extent to which Europe is indeed a convenient and appropriate setting for common action."[18] Interesting for the purpose of this thesis is the fact that the publication ties in to the reason for which the HEH was thought up and installed: "But if unity were to be achieved it would be necessary to overcome the legacy of centuries of division and even hostility between the main national groups. For this a great campaign of public education would be demanded and this would have to concentrate upon demonstrating what these national groups had in common and the extent to which the European cultural heritage was a single whole."[19] However, one must keep in mind that the political context of 1957 and of today radically differ. Europe's common traits and simultaneous diverse histories in the context of a turbulent time in Europe as mainly communism drew a wedge between the east and the west, resulted in a nuanced conclusion: "The outcome would depend upon the level of statesmanship of which the non-Communist countries of Europe would reveal themselves capable."[20]

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[13] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.
[14] Stuart Woolf, "Europe and its Historians," 325.
[15] Ibid., 327.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Antonis Liakos, "The Canon of European History and the Conceptual Framework of National Historiographies," in *Transnational Challenges to National History Writing,* ed. M. Middell and L. Roura (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 327.
[18] Max Beloff, *Europe and the Europeans: An International Discussion* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 278.
[19] Ibid., 31.
[20] Ibid.*,* 277.

Today, historical writing on Europe seems more important than ever, since it can have a valuable role in the acceptation of, and contribution to the EU by Europe's citizens. European cross-border cooperation is encouraged by the EU, for which it puts available funding opportunities. The next section briefly discusses some initiatives and tools that the EU set up in order to reach its citizens in the class-room.

1.1.2 Teaching Europe

Education, citizenship and identity greatly relate to each other. Although member states of the EU enjoy complete sovereignty when it comes to their education systems, the EU can provide a supportive role in, for example, helping to tackle common challenges like ageing societies, a lack of particular skills in the workforce, technological developments, and global competition.[21] The most well-known and successful initiative of the EU today concerning supportive education for its citizens is the Erasmus program. Having its roots in the 1980s, the Erasmus program has facilitated foreign exchange for over four million university students, educators, and apprentices.[22] Competences such as intercultural skills and the broadening of the mind by settling in another EU (or non-EU) region are highly valued in the program, and aim to create a more inclusive and coherent generation of young Europeans.[23]

The late 1980s also saw an implementation of European oriented courses in university curricula, as the EU became a central player in both domestic and international politics.[24] The agreement by ministers of education of 29 European countries to harmonize European educational systems laid out in the Bologna Declaration of 1999, indicated a further European-wide cooperation regarding education (with a pedagogical element).[25] It can be argued that the education ministers "looked to ensure the effective preparation of students as citizens of Europe and as European citizens in a highly integrated international community."[26] This was roughly the context in which the creation of entire higher education programs dedicated to European studies and European Union studies emerged. Since the Bologna Declaration, the EU has

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[21] "Strategic framework – Education & Training 2020," European Commission, accessed 26 June, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework_en.
[22] "Erasmus+: Key figures," European Commission, accessed 23 June, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/key-figures_en.
[23] "In the spotlight: Erasmus+ opens up your mind," European Commission, accessed 24 June, 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/anniversary/spotlight-erasmus-opens-your-mind_en.
[24] Stefania Baroncelli et. al., *Teaching and Learning the European Union: Traditional and Innovative Methods* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 1.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 41.

initiated several educational projects to specifically promote its citizenship, aiming to increase its citizen's participation within the political body.

As stated before, education is a policy field that strictly belongs to the competences of the member states. However, the EU does provide tools that teachers can use in order to address the EU in the form of online material to assist in teaching children in primary and secondary education. For example, a textbook called *The European Union: What it is and what it does* explains in a clear manner to fifteen-year-olds (and above) precisely what the title says: it explains what the European Union is, what it does in 35 different areas to improve the lives of people in Europe, how the institutions are built up, and how decision-making takes place.[27] Nevertheless, too many educative initiatives coming from the political body of the EU can have a negative connotation. To balance the political and historical narrative that the EU provides, teachers must keep in mind that such tools have to be complemented with other, more critical informative texts or visuals, such as newspaper articles, for the pupils to really grasp the meaning and implementation of EU policies.

1.1.3 Involving the public

For the European Parliament, the HEH can be seen as a cultural tool for a political end, and this choice of tool can over time prove to have been a very valuable one. Museums are deemed one of the most trustworthy transmitters of information. In Rosenzweig and Thelen's *The Presence of the Past,* Americans ascribe certain qualities to museums that lack in other mediums such as textbooks, non-fiction books, and movies.[28] These qualities include a sense of immediacy, personal participation and interaction with primary sources that reminds of independent research; the possibility to observe on one's own terms; coming to conclusions by yourself instead of someone telling you his or her conclusions; the artefact exhibited gives a feeling of reality and authenticity; and finally, visits to museums resemble the intimacy of family gatherings, an important element for people to feel connected to the past.[29] The fact that the museum is regarded by the people as a high authority in the field of history gives it a certain responsibility of 'telling the story right'.[30]

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[27] European Commission, *The European Union: What it is and what it does* (Luxemburg: Publications Office of the European union, 2018), accessed 24 June, 2018, https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/715cfcc8-fa70-11e7-b8f5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF.
[28] Roy Rosenzweig and David P. Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life*, 21.
[29] Ibid.*,* 107.
[30] Stephanie Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge," *Museum Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2010), 22.

Museums function as a bridge between the academic world and the public. It gives people an alternative way to access and deal with history, of which the public can make use on a voluntary basis. The discipline that is of concern with this bridging between the academic and the public is called public history, and it deals with history outside of the classroom. Nevertheless, public history has a wider range of definitions. The American historian Robert Kelley founded one of the early graduate programs in public history in 1978, which was mainly focused on the vocational side of public history: how to get a job and what public historians have to offer. He stated: "in Public History, the historian answers questions posed by others. He or she serves as a consultant, a professional, a member of the staff."[31] This ties in to the job-crisis for academic historians in the 1970s, and the understanding that it is difficult for freshly graduated historians to find a job in which they can work with the appropriate title. Public history offers an alternative scope of professions that can lead to a historian working for the government or for business corporations.[32]

However, to focus on the professional side of public history alone would give a too narrow impression. Public history is a coherent subject of study.[33] It deals with history in a new way, and is all about interaction with historians on the one hand and the public and stakeholders on the other hand. An integral concept of public history is 'shared authority', which means that historians do not have the full authority of interpreting the past, but that this should happen in collaboration with the public. The historian must be willing to listen to the public and respect diverging views regarding a specific subject.[34] Shared authority brings together the experience of the public and the expertise of professionals in an active dialogue that sheds light on different perspectives.[35] Shared authority can also come to the fore in the shape of evaluations of museum exhibits and civic engagement.[36] Especially in the reflection stage, experience and expertise can come together to fruitfully discuss what was good about an exhibition, and what could be improved. The input and involvement of the public leads to a redistribution of hierarchy, an abolishment of information coming strictly from the top-down, in which all groups do what they know best (experience - expertise).

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[31] Robert Kelley, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (1978), 18.
[32] Ibid., 22.
[33] Paul Knevel, "Public History: The European Reception of an American Idea?" *Levend Erfgoed* 6, no. 2 (2009) 5.
[34] Cherstin, M. Lyon; Elizabeth M. Nix; Rebecca K. Shrum, *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 10.
[35] Michael Frisch, "From A *Shared Authority* to the Digital Kitchen, and Back," in *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World,* ed. Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski (Philadelphia: The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, 2011), 128.
[36] Cherstin, M. Lyon; Elizabeth M. Nix; Rebecca K. Shrum, *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences*, 11.

A visit to a museum increasingly has become a unique experience for the visitor. Visitors want to experience the past, smell it, touch it, to be submerged in it, and identify with heroes: much more than passively look at a schoolboard, learning dates by heart, or reading books about history.[37] Dealing with "an ever shrinking attention span", museums increasingly introduce popular and special exhibitions.[38] Moreover, it is argued that "museums are using less of their collections and [place] more focus on themed exhibitions."[39] In the case of the HEH, the concept started off as an idea that would underline the educative aspect of the prospective museum, and accordingly objects were carefully picked to illustrate and transmit those ideas. Dutch cultural historian Hendrik Henrichs held a plea for balanced historic museums. On the one hand, museums are allowed to play on the visitor's senses and in that way let them experience history, but on the other hand Henrichs calls for academics not to let the experiencing go too far. Apart from enjoying an afternoon in a museum, the public needs to think critically about the exposition, and the exposition should have some sort of impact on the public, whether this be the expansion of views, opening up to different perspectives, or the confirmation or rejection of a certain idea. To be able to do that, it is the responsibility of scholars to provide the public with the adequate information so visitors can come to their own conclusions.[40]

1.1.4 Exhibiting Europe

Europe is increasingly becoming a subject of display or a theme in national exhibitions. This trend is related to more careful approach towards national narratives and how to present them in museums. National museums broke with the hierarchy of a strictly top-down, ideologized approach that would serve as propaganda for a united society. Now, in a post-modern setting, the national narrative needs to include much more than the victory story of the nation. National narratives face the need of transnational contextualisation in order not to become old-fashioned and to keep up with the modern trend.[41]

Cultural and social projects are often seen as tools of the EU in bringing its citizens closer to the political body. Bridging the gap and increased citizen participation are key phrases

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[37] Hendrik Henrichs, "Historisch denken of het verleden beleven: Public History en musea," *Levend Erfgoed* 6, no. 2 (2009), 15.

[38] Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen, and Kerstin Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe in Museums: Transnational Networks, Collections, Narratives and Representations* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2014) 20.

[39] Stephanie Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge," 29.

[40] Hendrik Henrichs, "Historisch denken of het verleden beleven: Public History en musea," 15-19.

[41] Veronika Settele, "Book review Exhibiting Europe in museums: transnational networks, collections, narratives and representations," *European Societies* 18, no. 5 (2016), 560.

used in such projects. Interestingly, whereas the individual state subsidies for culture are being cut back, EU funding is increasingly important for museums.[42] The emphasis of the EU on the cultural dimension of the Union results in a continuous flow of money in order to highlight the European dimension in the EU. The 55 million euros from the European Parliament that financed the House of European History demonstrates the importance the EU gives to connecting with its citizens. However, the creation of museums and exhibitions that stimulate the visitor's reflective practices and opinions on Europe does not necessarily lead to an increase in European's political activity. It does have the potential of limiting Euroscepticism, and one could ask whether a more positive view on the EU is the actual main goal of European institutions when creating or (financially) supporting exhibitions on European (integration) history.[43]

Similarly, other projects have addressed the theme of a European narrative. One bridge-building program is the *Narratives for Europe* project which ran from 2008 until 2012, and which has "not been seeking a "mega" or singular narrative, but instead strives to gather, weave together, share and amplify the many new narratives that are being written all around us, every day."[44] *Narratives for Europe* was initiated by the European Cultural Foundation (ECF), which stresses the cultural dimension in the European integration process: "By sharing and promoting good practice examples of citizen engagement and participatory governance, we contribute to local and EU policy."[45] What *Narratives for Europe* thus did is to give the word to Europeans (including migrants who came to Europe) and by means of a few questions, some of them very difficult to answer indeed, giving a platform to a multitude of perspectives.

Another, more tangible exhibition, providing a political narrative, is the Parlamentarium, or the European Parliament visitor's centre. In 2011 the visitors centre of the EP opened, while promising its guests to "give you a unique insight into the work of MEPs and how their work touches your daily life."[46] The Parlamentarium introduces visitors to the members, structure, and functioning of the EP in an interactive way. Similarly as in the HEH,

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[42] Chiara De Cesari, "Museums of Europe: Tangles of Memory, Borders, and Race," *Museum Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (2017) 19.

[43] Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen, and Kerstin Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe in Museums: Transnational Networks, Collections, Narratives and Representations*,186.

[44] "Narratives for Europe (2009-2012)," European Cultural Foundation, June 18, 2017, accessed 12 March, 2018, http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/narratives-for-europe.

[45] "Strategic decisions on the Europe of the future," European Cultural Foundation, September 20, 2017, accessed 12 March, 2018, http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/strategic-decisions-on-the-europe-of-the-future.

[46] "European Parliament opens new "Parlamentarium" visitors centre," European Parliament, 7 October, 2011, accessed 10 March, 2018, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20110922STO27176/european-parliament-opens-new-parlamentarium-visitors-centre.

the Parlamentarium also provides audio material, available in all the EU's 24 official languages, that complements the images and objects displayed which are not accompanied by text. In a sense, the Parlamentarium is designed for large groups of people: the spaces are ample, several of the same interactive devices are placed throughout the rooms, and a great diversity of screens and comfortable couches are placed to accommodate Europeans to listen to the voices of other Europeans. Nevertheless, the highlight of the exhibition is a large room that simulates the Parliament itself. The semi-circular setting is surrounded by a 360° projection in which the day-to-day practices of the EP are explained and simulated.

The next section discusses more in-depth another exhibition that saw light prior to the HEH, and therefore created a base of knowledge and experience on which the HEH could build. This exhibition deserves more space than the ones previously discussed, as it showed more similarities to the ideas that the HEH professes.

1.1.5 C'est notre histoire!

On the occasion of the 50 year anniversary of the Treaty of Rome (1957), a small group of historians launched the project of 'the Museum of Europe' of which the main goal was to familiarize Europeans with the roots of their common civilization.[47] From the 25th of October 2007 until the 9th of May 2008, the Museum of Europe set up an exhibition in Brussels called *C'est notre histoire! 50 ans d'aventure européenne* (or in Dutch: *Dit is onze geschiedenis! Een 50-jarig Europees avontuur*). Reasons for this initiative were, firstly, the lack of interest in shared democratic debate in Europe; secondly, the limitations of a political Europe confined to the EU framework; and lastly, the growing importance of tourism in the city of Brussels.[48] This exhibition was thus a cultural solution for a political problem.

The exhibition aimed to build bridges between the city of Brussels, European citizens, and the European institutions that are accommodated in Brussels. There are several ways to do this. For example, one of the rooms focussed on the myth of the founding fathers. This narrative of strong European leaders that played an important role in post-war European integration partly depoliticises the process by focussing on their private lives – what kind of men they were – and in such a way portray them as proto-Europeans.[49] The history of European integration in the

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[47] "Het Museum van Europa," Museum van Europa, accessed 8 March, 2018, http://www.expo-europe.be/content/view/13/32/lang,nl/.
[48] Wolfram Kaiser, Stefan Krankenhagen, and Kerstin Poehls, *Exhibiting Europe in Museums: Transnational Networks, Collections, Narratives and Representations,* 21-22.
[49] Ibid., 133.

second half of the twentieth century lacks of outstanding, charismatic figures in the public arena. Therefore, the exhibition offers the opportunity for Europeans to get to know the leaders in a more private sphere. The exhibition saw itself as a push in the right direction regarding developments concerning the lack of affiliation with the EU coming from the people of Belgium and Brussels. Therefore, it did not intend to solve this deficit straight away but considered the exhibition as a starting point. Also, the exhibition did not fail to explicitly point out that although it was an official exhibition of the European Commission, the Commission did not dictate what should be put on display. The status of officiality was purely a financial formality.[50]

Ideally, museums are perfect places where Europeans can ask themselves whether they agree with what is on display or not. Both positive and negative reactions prove to be fruitful to the development of the presented narrative. Wolfram Kaiser points out that the EU's success stories are usually the ones that are highlighted: the single market, economic growth, peace, transnational cooperation, competing on a world-wide scale. In these developments there are clearly winners and losers, and, logically, it is not desirable for the EU to talk about "the middle-aged German butcher who has lost his job in a slaughter-house in Westphalia to a more cheaply employed Polish colleague, and who emigrates to China where he opens a small business for selling German sausages to the Chinese nouveaux riches."[51] Still, European cooperation and integration has both positive and negative impacts, and both deserve a platform.

Seeing that public history is a relatively recent phenomenon, let alone a relatively new subject of study, much reflection needs to be done on how it is applied. A part of the exhibition *C'est notre histoire!* was to present testimonies of living Europeans. Kaiser observes that those testimonies had been "neatly selected and arranged so as to cover most of the EU's major objectives and policies."[52] Some testimonies even seemed to replicate one to one European Commission policy papers and rhetoric.[53] Moreover, these positive testimonies came predominantly from well-educated, middle- and upper-middle class professionals. The Europeans that are to be said to represent the 'real', living Europeans thus are the ones who socio-economically and culturally benefit most from European integration.[54] Consequently, a significant gap opens up between realism and idealism. Therefore, critical reflection on public history practices is an integral part of the discipline and is needed to bring such discrepancies

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[50] Tempora, Press conference "Dit is onze geschiedenis! Een 50-jarig Europees avontuur," 20 March 2007, accessed online on 8 March 2018, http://docplayer.nl/15690170-Dit-is-onze-geschiedenis.html
[51] Wolfram Kaiser, "From Great Men to Ordinary Citizens? The Biographical Approach to Narrating European Integration in Museums," *Culture Unbound* 3, no. 3 (2011), 394.
[52] Ibid., 393.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

to light.[55] By means of determining specific goals and discussing with the stakeholders what their aims are in a project, problems can be set, which then can be targeted in an effective way with a focused approach.[56] What is the aim of the exhibition? Is it to paint a positive picture of European integration? Is it to inform the public? If yes, in what way? A different, spontaneous, non-organized collection of visitor's testimonies can have the advantage of leading to a rich variety of different views on Europe and the EU. These can involve positive views, but also less positive, critical ones.[57]

1.2 Memory as a concept

The concepts of history and memory overlap in several important aspects but are far from synonymous. American historian Jay Winter describes the distinction between history and memory as follows: "History is memory seen through and criticized with the aid of documents of many kinds – written, aural, visual. Memory is history seen through affect. And since effect is subjective, it is difficult to examine the claims of memory in the same way as we examine the claims of history. History is a discipline."[58] Memory is thus more personal than history, and differs with every person, whereas history is more tangible. The question of how we use our mental images of the present to reconstruct our past was addressed for the first time by French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1887-1945). In *On Collective Memory* (1925), Halbwachs demonstrates the selectivity of collective memory. Men are always in contact with other men, and the groups of which men are part of (the family, religion, class) each have their own collective memory. It is this collective memory that shapes the behavior of individuals.[59] Therefore, human memory cannot exist out of the collectivity, according to Halbwachs, with the exception of dreams.[60] As Lewis A. Coser states in an introductory chapter to Halbwachs' book: "Memory needs continuous feeding from collective sources and is sustained by social and moral props. Just like God needs us, so memory needs others."[61]

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[55] Cherstin, M. Lyon; Elizabeth M. Nix; Rebecca K. Shrum, *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audiences*, 12-14.
[56] Ibid., 13.
[57] Wolfram Kaiser, "From Great Men to Ordinary Citizens? The Biographical Approach to Narrating European Integration in Museums," 396.
[58] Jay Winter, "The performance of the past: memory, history, identity," in *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe,* edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 12.
[59] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 23.
[60] Ibid., 169.
[61] Ibid., 34.

Yet, an event that strongly impacted a society or group, or the near loss of a memory reinvigorates the, in the terms of Pierre Nora, *lieux de mémoire*. *Lieux de mémoire* are sites of memory set up because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory.[62] Nora argues that there is no spontaneous memory because without intervention, time would sweep away memory.[63] In the Netherlands, every year on the fourth of May at eight o'clock in the evening the country holds a nation-wide two-minute silence to commemorate all the Dutch victims that were killed in war since the Second World War. In the Belgium city of Ypres, the Last Post still sounds every evening as a recurring last goodbye to the fallen soldiers in the First World War. The Last Post Association is committed to keep this tradition eternally, as it has done in the last ninety years. Were such commemorations to disappear, some sense of knowledge and consciousness of the events in history that they address would get lost too, meaning that the events will linger less in the historical consciousness of future generations.

In addition to that, as was stated above, historical consciousness is important to understand where and who we are today. Therefore, lieux de mémoire are important aspects of present-day societies. Benoît Majerus poses the question of how the term 'lieu de mémoire' developed into a pan-European historiographical concept.[64] Nora with his theory tried to overcome the classic master narrative of the nation by offering a counter-project as it were to all the national histories. Although Nora coined this term in a strictly French environment, the concept dispersed throughout Western Europe. The Iron Curtain prevented Nora's work from entering in the thought of Central and Eastern Europe and therefore all the national projects that were built upon *lieux de mémoire* were carried out in Western Europe.[65] It is developments such as these (the unequal spread of a thought or a concept) that influence the difficulties in debates about a common European memory and history. As a consequence, in the context of the countries that fell east of the Iron Curtain ""lieux de mémoire" did not necessarily represent a possible deconstruction of national discourse, but instead they were seen as a means to construct positively connoted European narratives in opposition to negatively connoted national(ist) narratives."[66] Majerus demonstrates that the concept of lieux de mémoire as Nora intended it

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[62] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989), 7.
[63] Ibid., 12.
[64] Benoît Majerus, "The "lieux de mémoire": a place of remembrance for European historians?" in *Erinnerungsorte: Chancen, Grenzen un Perspektiven eines Erfolgskonzeptes in den Kulturwissenschaften*, edited by Stefan Berger and Joana Seiffert (Essen: Klartext, 2014), 128.
[65] Ibid., 123.
[66] Ibid., 125.

has broadened its spectrum and taken on different meanings. It even goes as far as being incorporated into the commercial world of tourism.[67]

1.2.1 A collective memory?

On a personal level, as the prominent scholar in memory studies Aleida Assmann argues, it is clear that individual memory exists.[68] Individual memory takes place on a highly personal level and includes the experiences that one has lived, and the emotions that one feels regarding those experiences and events. Memory can be very specific and can be triggered by associations made involuntarily, such as Proustian moments. Seeing that memory is so personal and sometimes involuntarily, is there such a thing as a collective memory? Or is collective memory a social construct for political ends? Although Assmann dislikes the term collective memory herself because of its vagueness ("I prefer to replace it with three different terms: social, political, and cultural memory"[69]) she enters in a debate with the American writer Susan Sontag. Sontag states in *Regarding the Pain of Others*:

> Strictly speaking, there is no such a thing as collective memory […]. But there is collective instruction.
> All memory is individual, unreproducible—it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.[70]

Sontag illustrates this statement by looking at what we see around us as visual material. For example, institutions such as museums choose to show what they think its audience, and society, should remember. A proliferation of museums about genocide and other horrors that happened in history demonstrate this, as they are strong in transmitting a collective feeling of suffering.[71] Other events in history might be "too dangerous to social stability to activate and to create", such as a lack museums on the history of slavery in the United States demonstrates.[72] In this way, what is called 'collective memory' is constructed and therefore not a spontaneous phenomenon, what Pierre Nora likewise argues. Institutions and authorities choose what is

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[67] Benoît Majerus, "The "lieux de mémoire": a place of remembrance for European historians?" 30.
[68] Aleida Assmann, "Reframing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past," in *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe,* edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 35.
[69] Ibid., 41.
[70] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 67-68.
[71] Ibid., 68.
[72] Ibid., 69.

included in and excluded from the collective memory. Aleida Assmann argues that Sontag's reasoning is not entirely complete, but that collective memory is something more than just another name for ideology. Assmann stresses that "human beings do not only live in the first person singular, but also in various formats of the first person plural. They become part of different groups whose 'we' they adopt together with the respective 'social frames' that imply an implicit structure of shared concerns, values, experiences, and narratives."[73] Autobiographical memories can be shared with others, which removes them from exclusively belonging to the individual. This sharing of memories goes through language and symbols.[74] Assmann argues that the personal memories intersect and are being shaped by the memories of the collectives that an individual is part of. The family, the generation, the society, the neighborhood—the memories of these collectivities are what influences the personal memory.[75] Therefore, a collective memory exists and it is open to debate and change, assets that are not applicable for the term ideology.

1.2.2 The consolidation of Western, Central, and Eastern European history and memory

The motto of the European Union, 'unity in diversity', reflects Europe's history as it is marked largely with warfare. However, developments such as the establishment of trade associations demonstrate that a certain degree of cooperation was desirable. Now, it is in the interest of the EU to emphasize the factors that bind Europeans together and to make sense of Europe's variety of cultures, mentalities, and languages. Shared values such as democracy, humanism, and fraternity that stretch across borders should be felt in the heart of every European, according to proponents of European cultural integration. If this is not the case, then the EU aims to disperse the idea that it is in everybody's interest to strive towards unity instead of shattering the continent into hundreds of separate pieces.

One of the major difficulties to overcome in telling an over-arching European story is the difference in importance of certain ingrained national memories. Colonialism has played a big part in only a handful of European countries; the Holocaust had a bigger impact on some countries than on others; and the legacy of the Iron Curtain and the rule of the Soviet Union and communism in the East, and the market economies in the West mark totally different stories in the national narratives which should be somehow all included into a European one. The tendency is a more Western European focused view. The significant difference in publications

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[73] Aleida Assmann, "Reframing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past," 37.
[74] Aleida Assmann, "Transformations between History and Memory," *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008), 50.
[75] Aleida Assmann, "Reframing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past," 40.

from Western and Eastern European scholars on memory, or the difference in accessibility and notability, makes that the story of a European memory tends to have a Western flavor. There are notable publications on memory by Eastern European authors, but these have not always been accessible due to communication barriers.[76] Moreover, what is understood by the term 'European memory' seems to be already clear-cut and defined by Western European scholars, leaving voices from Central and Eastern Europe out. European memory seems to be a normatively Western term. It is curious to see how an institution such as the HEH deals with this situation regarding the complex term of European memory.

As a consequence, along with this East-West dichotomy comes a certain hierarchy in what is seen as important to remember. A perhaps unconsciously constructed ranking exists, of which of the atrocities were worse, and which need to be paid more attention to in a European memory. In terms of which experience has remained more engraved in memory, American historian Charles Maier presents the following question: "Why does the black book of Nazism remain, in the consciousness of so many of those preoccupied by the history of the twentieth century, blacker than the black book of Communism?"[77] Maier states that in the West "we must really blow on the embers of the Gulag to revive the appropriate fear and loathing," a sense that the memory of the gulag has turned cold.[78] The horrors of Nazism, more specifically the Holocaust, has gained increasing visibility in the forms of museums, monuments, and other sites of *lieux de mémoire*, and therefore is a 'hot' memory. It even goes as far as deeming Holocaust memory as a 'European negative founding myth'.[79] Małgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak write in the introduction to their book *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives* that Eastern European memory is juxtaposed to projects of a common European memory and that Eastern European memory is seen as something that is unique and of a fundamentally different character to that of the West.[80] This point of view puts Eastern European memory on the periphery once more, instead of regarding it as an integral part of a pan-European memory. However, when incorporating a comparison between Nazism and Communism into a common European narrative, the latter loses its distinctiveness which can

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[76] Małgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak, "Memory and Change in Eastern Europe: How Special?" in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspective*, edited by Małgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 11.
[77] Charles S. Maier, "Hot Memory … Cold Memory. On the Political Half-Life of Fascist and Communist Memory," *Transit. Tr@ansit Online* 22 (2002), accessed 23 February, 2018, http://www.iwm.at/transit/transit-online/hot-memory-cold-memory-on-the-political-half-life-of-fascist-and-communist-memory/.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Claus Leggewie, "A Tour of the Battleground: The Seven Circles of Pan-European Memory," *Social Research* 75, no. 1 (2008), 219.
[80] Małgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak, "Memory and Change in Eastern Europe: How Special?" 10.

lead to a lumping together of Communism and Nazism and can therefore disqualify the Communist ideology as a whole.[81]

Friedemann Pestel et al. bring to light ambiguous facets of universalizing memory practices and argue for the studying of mnemonic signifiers such as the 'Great War', '68', and 'Enlightenment', and to "relate competing and temporally changing interpretations of the past, rather than studying the materiality of factuality of the signified."[82] An example of one specific conundrum regarding universalizing (European) memory that Friedemann Pestel et al. address is the case of the Holodomor, the man-made Great Famine in the Ukraine in the 1930s which killed millions of Ukrainians. This Ukrainian memory is difficult to place as it struggles, like the country itself, between the two powers that surround it. If the Holodomor would be integrated into European Memory, it would challenge the uniqueness of the Holocaust. If the Holodomor would be placed and admitted in Russian memory, it would bring into question the heroic narrative of the Soviet-Russian victory against fascism.[83] The practice of studying mnemonic signifiers seems an interesting approach, but in a European context could have the danger of telling the story of the victors. The subjects of the 'gulag' and '68' have two different audiences and could isolate the events in their respective territories.

Nonetheless, an approach that deals with several narratives instead of *one* European narrative is desirable. Claus Leggewie emphasizes Europe's cultural diversity (including those that have their roots outside of Europe, i.e. immigrants and refugees) and proposes seven concentric circles as anchor points of supra- and transnational memory: The Holocaust as a negative founding myth; Soviet-Communism—equally criminal?; expulsions as a pan-European trauma?; the Armenian question—unanswered?; European periphery; Europe as a continent of immigration; and Europe's success story after 1945.[84]

Maier's question of why the Holocaust has a more prominent place in Europe on the one hand, and the example of the Holodomor on the other hand, illustrates the East-West dichotomy that clearly came to the fore in a political issue on the institutional level of the EU. The 'Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism', signed in 2008, is a

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[81] Laure Neumayer, "Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: The Mobilizations Around the 'Crimes of Communism' in the European Parliament," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 3 (2015), 353.
[82] Friedemann Pestel, Rieke Trimçev, Gregor Feindt & Félix Krawatzek, "Promise and challenge of European Memory," *European Review of History* 24, no. 4 (2017), 500.
[83] Ibid., 499.
[84] Claus Leggewie, "A Tour of the Battleground: The Seven Circles of Pan-European Memory."

Europe-wide official condemnation of the crimes of communism and embodies the counternarrative of the horrors of Nazism.[85]

In 2010, several Central and Eastern European countries asked the EU to create a law that would penalize denial of communist crimes, just like the EU Holocaust denial law. However, the EU rejected the request because the "opinion is too divided on the matter and […] there is no legal basis allowing Brussels to act."[86] With the exception of Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania and Bulgaria, the denial of Communist crimes is absent in the national legislation of most EU member states.[87] One could ask the question whether the decision of the EU not to act is a product of Western normative standards regarding European memory and the unclear pertinence of the Central and Eastern European memories in the collective. Estonian political philosopher Siobhan Kattago distinguishes in this case between two types of Europeans: "If new Europeans tend to emphasize the similarities of Communism and Nazism as totalitarian regimes, old Europeans maintain the uniqueness of the Holocaust."[88] Kattago comes with a rather pacifistic solution in the debate on contrasting views of history in the Postwar period, especially about the role of the Soviet Union which is deemed a perpetrator in post-Soviet states, but has a heroic connotation in present day Russia. Kattago argues that "[p]luralism entails respect for different memories of the past and recognition of difference. […] Agreeing to disagree is neither a whitewashing of the past nor a grand narrative, but an acknowledgement of different conflicting memories of historical events."[89]

1.3 The concept of a European narrative

How we deal with history in the sense of what has been chosen to show and what to leave out, tells a certain story, a sequence of events that has taken on meaning. The narrative organizes facts into such a sequence, and tries to explain change. In this way, the narrative provides a framework in stringing events together. Plot is the way that events and happenings are organized into one meaningful whole.[90] The historian interprets the past and goes through a

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[85] Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, June 3rd, 2008, Prague, Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, accessed online, http://www.praguedeclaration.eu/.

[86] Leigh Phillips, "EU rejects eastern states' call to outlaw denial of crimes by communist regimes," *The Guardian*, 21 December, 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/21/european-commission-communist-crimes-nazism.

[87] Laure Neumayer, "Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: The Mobilizations Around the 'Crimes of Communism' in the European Parliament," 357.

[88] Siobhan Kattago, "Agreeing to Disagree on the Legacies of Recent History: Memory, Pluralism and Europe after 1989," *European Journal of Social Theory* 12, no. 3 (2009), 386.

[89] Ibid., 391.

[90] Barbara Czarniawska, *Narratives in Social Science Research* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), 7.

process of selection, ordering, and narrating in order to present the findings. Historians choose their facts and arrange them according to their own thoughts and interpretations, which leads to different outcomes and makes the reader see the past in a certain way. Also, the historian influences the perception of the reader by choosing the method of presentation: does the historian choose an approach of comparison or contrast? Keeping in mind that narratives are constructed, one needs to understand what lies at the base of this construction. Accordingly, it is important to look at what happens and why it happens in the narrative of the House of European History.

The narrative as a story is not merely a 'story' in the sense that it has the connotation of being a chain of events. Narrative has much deeper implications: "Narrative [as a story] has been used in this sense to refer to the story that evinces a culture's world-view or ideology and serves to legitimize its relative values and goals."[91] Narratives can be used as tools to gain or maintain power. The historical narrative, or the lack of knowledge of an adequate historical narrative, can have serious consequences. Tosh gives a good example to illustrate why historians are so important when it comes to contemporary events. He discusses the horrific acts on 9/11 and explains that they should be looked at by putting what happened into perspective. To look at the attack on the Twin Towers without having knowledge of the processes around it, can draw out feelings of outrage and vengeance. However, as is usually the case, there is not only one story to unravel but several. These processes were, to quote Tosh: "the growth of Islamic fundamentalism […]; the continuing crisis in Palestine; the collapse of central power in several Islamic countries; the resentment against US intervention in the Middle East, especially since the Gulf War; and the instability of international relations since the end of the Cold War."[92] These are developments which prior to the attacks had not been considered together and could now be connected to constitute the events that led up to the attacks.

1.3.1 Different views on a European narrative

The debate about whether a European narrative exists incorporates diverging views. It can be argued that there is no such thing as a European narrative, as well as it can be argued that there is a wide variety of European narratives, which leads again to the denial of the existence of 'a' European narrative. Sassatelli argues in "Has Europe Lost the Plot? Europe's Search for a New

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[91] J. Amos Hatch and Richard Wisniewski, *Life History and Narrative* (London; Washington DC: The Falmer Press, 1995), 7.
[92] J. Tosh, *Why History Matters*, 48.

Narrative Imagination" that the plot that founded the European cooperation no longer holds up for the idea of a united Europe.[93] The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was to put an end to centuries of European wars, an ideal celebrated by the war-fatigued continent. However, after nearly eighty years of peace on the western part of Europe, a new plot needs to legitimize an ever deepening EU.

The main institutional narrative today about Europe's culture and identity values both the continent's unity, as well as its cultural diversity.[94] Seeing that there are many different cultures involved in the European project, the EU's 'all-saying, nothing-saying' motto deals with a carefully approached concept of European cooperation. Sassatelli states the complexity in terminology and explanation that the EU deals with: "Too much emphasis on unity or too much detail on the actual content of the 'common cultural heritage' and they will provoke criticism from right and left, too much emphasis on diversity and they will simply provide arguments for those who say that there is no story to tell at all."[95] A balance needs to be kept between the uniqueness and sovereignty of each member state on the one hand, and the story of European integration on the other hand. Tuuli Lähdesmäki points out that the task of constructing a shared European memory is extremely challenging by illustrating that "the historical memory is still strongly attached to national contexts" even in the pan-European event of the Second World War.[96] In her study to the EP's Parlamentarium, the visitor's center of the European Parliament, she emphasizes the functional utility of the exhibition, as the emphasis on culture, history, and heritage "function as affective instruments in creating a sense of common belonging."[97] The weight on a 'thick' cultural identity that entails a shared history, heritage, memory, and values, as opposed to a 'thin' civic identity, based on the political side of identity (citizenship, legal agreements) is an act of power lain on Europeans from the top-down.[98] However, this approach aims to activate bottom-up participation in the form of self-created identification to the EU or Europe.[99]

The steps towards a largely political identity can be seen in the 'Document on The European Identity' published in 1973 in Copenhagen. This document would enable the then

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[93] M. Sassatelli, "Has Europe Lost the Plot?: Europe's Search for a New Narrative Imagination," *European Cultural Foundation* (2012), 3, accessed 24 February, 2018, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/526e5978e4b0b83086a1fede/t/59494ceee4fcb5287dc5673d/149797604778 8/M.+Sassatelli+Has+Europe+lost+the+plot.pdf.

[94] Ibid., 4.

[95] Ibid., 5.

[96] Tuuli Lähdesmäki, "Narrativity and intertextuality in the making of a shared European memory," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 25, no. 1 (2017) 61.

[97] Ibid., 67.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid., 68.

nine member states of the European Community to "achieve a better definition of their relations with other countries and of their responsibilities and the place which they occupy in world affairs."[100] Although a common heritage does come forward, it is largely a political document for the EC to help define itself, and for international partners to identify the EC, which would make the EC an easier, more approachable partner to work with. The quest for a common European culture and memory was solidified in the Maastricht Treaty in the 1990s.[101] Article 128 stated that "the Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore."[102] The idea of *the* common cultural heritage and the fact that more emphasis is being laid on it, demonstrates the course towards the creation of a European society.

Subsequently, in 2014, Ann Rigney uses Article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty – also enshrined in the more recent Lisbon Treaty (2007) – in her analysis to what was then a work in progress of the House of European History and the ongoing discussion on Europe and memory that surrounds such a museum.[103] She states the difficult task that the EU is attempting to fulfill, namely the creation of solidarity and a sense of neighborliness among people who have been indifferent to each other, who did not appear prominently in each other's identity narratives.[104] This important aspect in identity politics is reminiscent of the nation-building that happened largely in the nineteenth century and which includes the creation of 'imagined communities', a term of Benedict Anderson, in which a sense of fraternity is created to flow through the community. It is imagined because it is not possible to personally know and build such an intimate relationship with everyone in the community.[105] In the case of Europe, a top-down memory narrative has difficulties to reach the Europeans who are already quite indifferent to what is being decided on the EU's institutional level. Therefore, Rigney argues, the European people have to get reached by means of emotion and affect. Even the HEH, although it aims to appeal to all the senses of its visitors, would not succeed in drawing its visitors into an over-arching European solidarity. Does the HEH lack the power that the arts, creative writing, and

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[100] "Declaration on European Identity," European Union, Copenhagen, 14 December (1973), accessed 7 July, 2018, https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/02798dc9-9c69-4b7d-b2c9-f03a8db7da32/publishable_en.pdf.

[101] Chiara De Cesari, "Museums of Europe: Tangles of Memory, Borders, and Race," 19.

[102] "Article 128," Maastricht Treaty (Treaty on European Union), accessed online, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1992:191:FULL&from=EN.

[103] Ann Rigney, "Ongoing: Changing Memory and the European Project" in *Transantional Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*, edited by Chiara De Cesari and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 341.

[104] Ibid., 352.

[105] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York; London: Verso, 1983).

film-making have into drawing Europeans in and stimulate participation on a voluntary level, while simultaneously awaken a European transnational memory?[106]

As became clear from this section, the debate on what should be incorporated in a European narrative is heated and complex. Moreover, one has to take into account that a 'European narrative' is different than a 'European Union narrative'. Europe stretches beyond the borders of the European Union, and excluding these histories from the narratives would be a mistake and a great loss. Also, as Leggewie argues, it is a misconception to limit the European narratives only to the geographical European space. Interactions outside of its borders is what has largely shaped Europe. Creating (new) historical narratives on the national level has already proven to be a difficult task. To establish a European narrative will probably never go without it being hit by wide-spread criticism, rightly so.

What are the ways to reach the public regarding the European narrative(s)? Should the approach of Rigney be taken and plunge European common history into a deeply emotional play or movie? To boldly incorporate contemporary developments from the field of dramatized history-making: should a version of the life of the EU's founding fathers be made in the fashion of the series *The Crown*? After all, such series would play on the emotions of the Europeans, awaken a dynamic interest and leave an impression. What is the role of the HEH in this debate? The next chapter introduces the HEH and gives information about its background and the process of its construction, which builds up to chapter three that addresses the content of the museum.

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[106] Ann Rigney, "Ongoing: Changing Memory and the European Project," 353.

2 Getting to Know the House of European History

> In national museums, European history is nearly always represented in purely national terms. I would like to suggest a locus for history and for the future, where the concept of the European idea can continue to grow. I would like to suggest the founding of a 'House of European History'. It should not be a dry, boring museum, but a place where our memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union.
>
> The President of the European Parliament,
> Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, MEP
> 13 February 2007[107]

The House of European History was an initiative of the European Parliament (EP) and opened its doors on the 6th of May, 2017. Its mission statement on the official website accessed on the 8th of December 2017, is as follows: "The House of European History is dedicated to the understanding of the shared past and diverse experiences of European people. It's a place where you can discover different points of view and common ground in European history." The House does not proclaim to replace the national histories of the European countries, but merely offers a different (European) perspective when looking at history. Hans-Gert Pöttering, then President of the EP, coined the idea as a cultural and historical basis for a political end, as can be read in the above quote. The House is now a body independent of the EP, but the question remains in how far the influence of the EP is still present in the House, as it was its main financer. Also, one could expect a certain clash between the political goals of the EP and the educative function of the House. This chapter sheds light on these questions, and deals with the construction of the HEH, the people involved, and the decisions made.

2.1 Initial plans and the relationship between the political and the academic

The initial idea to establish a House of European History was coined by former President of the EP Hans-Gert Pöttering, which he brought out in his inauguration speech in February 2007. The paragraph on the idea of the museum that Pöttering orated on his inauguration day in the EP, is the one that opens this chapter. Pöttering's carefully selected words show the idea of the

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[107] "Inaugural address by the President of the European Parliament," European Parliament, 13 February, 2007, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20070213+ITEM-003+DOC+XML+V0//EN.

museum that he had envisioned, as well as its desired outcome regarding European identity: "a *place* where our memory of European history and the work of European unification is *jointly cultivated*, and which at the same time *is available as a locus* for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union".[108] The text has a strong political connotation which got toned down over the period of ten years until the opening of the museum in 2017.

In October 2008, a document was released by a Committee of Experts of the HEH called *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History*. It was drawn up by the nine members of the committee, all historians and museum experts coming from various European countries.[109] Professor Hans Walter Hütter, President of the Foundation of the House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany, chaired the committee. The committee saw as the main goal of the museum: "to enable Europeans of all generations to learn more about their own history and, by so doing, to contribute to a better understanding of the development of Europe, now and in the future."[110] The development of Europe was seen as central to the exhibition of the HEH, and the aim was to exhibit the road Europe took in order to come where it is today, and to firmly establish its importance in current and future in the international spectrum. The focus on these initial ideas has shifted somewhat to a battle for justice and recognition on an ideological level, as will become clear later on in this thesis. The overall idea is that the House of European History should be a place in which the European idea comes alive.[111] In this document, emphasis was put on the twentieth century and the European integration process. The goal was to highlight the reasons for the willingness to create supranational bodies and the further integration process so that visitors understand the EU better today.[112] The Committee of Experts handed over the conceptual framework for the HEH to the then President of the EP (Pöttering), and concluded with emphasising that a "suitably design team be appointed" in order to create the institutional set-up.[113]

Academic independence is an important point made in the conceptual basis of the House. This concept is embodied and emphasised in the *Mid-Term Review of Hans-Gert Pöttering as President of the European Parliament*. In the section 'Communicating the European Parliament to the Citizen' it states that "one crucial point is to ensure [the House of

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[108] Own emphasis.
[109] Committee of Experts House of European History, *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History* (Brussels, 2008), 5.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid., 26.

European History's] clear political independence, which is a prerequisite both for the academic credibility [...] and for its acceptance by the public."[114] A high-level Academic Advisory Board would supervise the work done on the exhibition starting from January 2011.[115] The Academic Committee is chaired by Polish historian Włodzimierz Borodziej and further consists of historians and professionals that are from museums internationally renowned. According to the HEH's official website, the Committee has the task of giving advice on historical and museological transcription issues. The different nationalities of the Academic Committee give a diverse range of views and interests that is reflected in the permanent exhibition; i.e. the Committee does not only consist of scholars from Western Europe. Also, some members of the Committee enjoy greater publicity than others. The Hungarian historian Mária Schmidt, who also is the director of the House of Terror in Budapest, enjoys great visibility on the European level with her criticism on Germany and its chancellor Angela Merkel.[116] Moreover, Schmidt has strong views towards immigration and she has been described as Viktor Orbán's "court historian."[117] Whereas Schmidt enjoys great visibility, other members of the Committee are lesser known in the international field.

The congregation of the distinct people involved with the House enables the possibility that the political and ideological reasons behind the construction of a European narrative can differ depending on a person's background or beliefs. On the one hand, an exposition of European history can function to induce feelings of solidarity among Europeans, and to include non-European influences that helped shaped how Europe is today. On the other hand, a clear-cut definition of European history creates the distinction between what belongs to Europe, and what does not, and in that way it creates an "other". The narrative can be the same, but interpretations can vary.

2.2 The museum's structure

The Board of Trustees is described as the general management of the HEH and takes on a supervisory role. It consists of largely politicians, as opposed to the Academic Committee

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[114] European Parliament, *Mid-Term Review of Hans-Gert Pöttering as President of the European Parliament, January 2007 – April 2008*, 31, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/former_presidents/pottering/mid_term_review/en/MidTermReview.pdf.

[115] Committee of Experts House of European History, *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History,* 7.

[116] Mária Schmidt, "On the way to self-destruction—Historian Mária Schmidt on Europe's real problems—Part I," *Hungary Today,* 10 December, 2015, accessed 8 April, 2018, https://hungarytoday.hu/way-self-destruction-historian-maria-schmidt-europes-real-troubles-part-35577/.

[117] "Mária Schmidt, the Court Historian of Viktor Orbán," *Hungarian Spectrum,* 21 September, 2015, accessed 8 April, 2018, http://hungarianspectrum.org/2015/09/21/maria-schmidt-the-court-historian-of-viktor-orban/.

which is largely composed of historians.[118] The political dimension of the HEH, although not explicitly stated, comes to the fore in the shape of this Board. The Board consists of fifteen members that draw up a total of ten nationalities, with Germany and France as the most frequent ones (each have three members in the Board). The fact that on the one hand the idea of the House was an initiative of the German President of the EP, Pöttering, and on the other hand the high representation of Germans in the Board of Trustees reflects the lead of Germany in the organizational structure of the HEH.

Looking beyond the German contributors, Central- and Eastern European countries that feel strongly about their history (Hungary and Poland) are relatively well represented as well. These countries make a strong case to ensure that their part of the story is not overlooked or trivialized in the exposition. Other countries who struggle with the redefinition of their national history and who undergo internal debate on 'political correctness' in that history, and address the 'black pages' of national history, i.e. countries who draw less on their history within matters of politics and identity (the Netherlands) play a lesser role.[119] It has to be stated that these observations do not necessarily have direct implications for the project of the HEH. However, in order to understand a supranational structure, the 'national' part needs to be clear and stated.

The concept, narrative and historical content of the permanent exhibition was started by the Academic Project Team in 2011 which consists of historians, museum professionals and assistants.[120] Curator Constanze Itzel is the current Museum Director, and historian and curator Taja Vovk van Gaal holds the position of Creative Director.[121] The curatorial team sees a large number of different nationalities, which, at least in recent years, does not lead to clashes on contested memories as one might expect.[122]

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[118] "Board of Trustees and Academic Committee," House of European History, accessed 2 February, 2018, https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/organisation.

[119] An example of the complexities regarding the "heroic" history of Netherlands, this article by Dutch journalist and writer John Jansen van Galen concludes that people value and understand better binary opposite stories of good versus bad, and that often, as in the case of Dutch colonialism, prominent figures tended to have been both which results in an awkward, slightly embarrassed relationship of the contemporary Dutch to their "national heroes." https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/nl/artikel/6600/wat-willen-we-niet-weten-over-ons-verleden.html accessed 10 April, 2018.

[120] Andrea Mork, "Presentation of the House of European History," 'European Remembrance' Symposium, Gdánsk, 15 September, 2012, 2.

[121] "House of European History Team," House of European History, accessed 9 April, 2018, https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/house-of-the-european-history-project-team.

[122] Joanna Urbanek, meeting with curator in HEH, 25 April, 2018.

3 Narrating the history of Europe in the HEH

The permanent exhibition of the House of European History entails many different topics and objects. Since discussing all sections in depth would make this thesis too lengthy, the analysis will focus more closely on those objects and stories that relate directly to the two focus points of this research – eastern/western memory and European integration – while simultaneously an attempt will be made to give a general impression of the exhibition. Throughout this chapter, references to the official guidebook are made to complement observation with information that the HEH provides. The study will draw partly on Stephanie Moser's methodology framework "for conducting research on the knowledge-making capacity of museum displays",[123] while emphasis will be put on identifying the narrative the museum has constructed. Moser points out that apart from the essence of the displayed objects and their individual function, other factors have an impact on how a museum presents its narrative to visitors, such as architecture, location and setting; space; design, colour and light; the message and texts; the way they are displayed and the style used, and finally the audience they target and reception.[124] In conducting the fieldwork for this research, Moser's approach to the knowledge-making capacity of museum exhibitions was kept in mind, as her methodology attempts to answer queries such as "how the technologies of presentation deployed in museums are integral to the formation of knowledge".[125] This relates back to the research question of this thesis in the sense that the HEH has constructed a narrative for Europeans (and non-Europeans) about Europe and European history, with the aim of presenting to this target group similarities and differences that exist on the continent, and that in the explicit political agenda of the EP as the main financer aspirates to create a more coherent European society.

Moser's elements have been used in this chapter where their function is apparent and where they add to the aim of this research, namely to describe the way in which the HEH constructs a common European narrative. The chapter following the current one contains deeper reflections on the permanent exhibition, but in order to understand them, one needs to become acquainted with the exhibition at first.

3.1 Before entering the permanent exhibition

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[123] Stephanie Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge," 22.
[124] Ibid., 30.
[125] Ibid., 23.

The HEH is housed in the Eastman Building, a former dental clinic, close to the European institutions. Moser points out that the architectural style of the a museum's building adds to the visitor's experience.[126] The building stems from 1934 and has a sober, static façade which transmits an authoritarian impression. Visitors do not enter from the monumental staircase that lead to the main doors, but due to the terrorist attacks in Brussels in 2016, they have to undergo a thorough security check behind one of the smaller, street-levelled doors. This adjustment delayed the museum's predicted opening in 2016 by one year.[127]

Before entering the exhibition rooms, visitors can opt to take a tablet, free of charge, to guide them through the rooms and to provide them with extra information about the objects that are on display. The tablets come with an ear-piece that equips the visitor with an audio introduction to each floor, as well as audio narration to several videos throughout the exhibition. In this way, the visitor has access to detailed information about the objects displayed and the narrative told. The information on the tablets is accessible in all official languages of the EU. Moreover, the tablet has the option to be adapted with special educative features for children. Once equipped with this tablet, the visitor passes the second floor of the temporary exhibition before climbing the stairs to the first floor of the permanent exhibition.

3.2 *Shaping Europe*: Getting to know Europe

When coming up from the stairs to the start of the first floor of the permanent exhibition, visitors encounter a rather dark and mysterious space. This floor plunges the visitor into a debate that has kept scholars, politicians, and citizens occupied for centuries: what is Europe? Europe has opposed itself to other continents such as Africa and Asia in order to define itself, but what happens if the geographic borders are not definable? Essentially, Europe is the western peninsula of the continent of Eurasia. But Europe is much more than merely a geographic space: it also entails civilisations, cultures, and more recently it embodies a political-economic entity.

A common starting point in the study to Europe is the myth of Europa and the bull, and so it is in the first section of the House of European History. The Phoenician princess Europa is abducted from the coast of today's Lebanon by the Greek god Zeus transformed as a bull, and taken to the Greek island of Crete, giving her name to the continent she landed on, Europe. Visitors contemplate several aspects of how to define Europe, for instance through (world) maps. In a showcase against the wall, visitors can examine several geographic mapping

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[126] Stephanie Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge," 24.
[127] Joanna Urbanek, meeting with curator in HEH, 25 April, 2018.

techniques used in order to design the world. It is explained that mapping can be used as a tool to exercise power, as the map-producer can present some countries on a more prominent position than other countries, or in a bigger scale than is accurate. To illustrate these power relations in mapping, alternative ways of mapping are also presented in the showcase: maps that contradict our traditional image of the world. Projected on a big circle shaped platform in the middle of the room is shown the development of the shaping of Europe and different perceptions of Europe throughout history.

Continuing, a showcase displays what can be considered European heritage and what binds the continent together. Topics such as the rule of law, Enlightenment, capitalism, Christianity, and philosophy are highlighted. Furthermore, in contrast to the above concepts, state terror, slave trade, colonialism, and genocide are included as well. Objects that represent the elements of this European heritage, such as an allegorical figure of Justice, and a blade from a guillotine, visualize these aspects of European heritage, and when one approaches the showcase, an image comes to light right below the placed object to show how this element of European heritage is still seen in Europe today. For each object, the tablet has an informative audio fragment in which questions are posed that the listener can think about. Visitors are stimulated to consider these questions and to interpret what is for themselves the meaning of the object and the concept it represents. These objects have been picked to demonstrate some basic aspects which are European, but they have been carefully placed and their constructivist quality is highlighted by posing questions such as 'what to preserve/contest?'. This question implicates that memory and heritage are personal notions, and that the answer to this question differs per person.

3.3 *Europe: A Global Power (1789-1914)*: The Long Nineteenth Century

The second floor welcomes the visitor with the tunes of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Ode an die Freude,* which the European Union adopted as its anthem. But the classical piece also symbolizes Europe as a whole. It gives a voice to European ideals such as freedom, peace, and solidarity.[128] This section of the museum focusses on the Long Nineteenth Century, from the French Revolution to the First World War, in which Europe underwent great political, cultural, and economic changes. The impact of the nineteenth century on Europe is shown by a series of objects displayed below the video that plays *Ode an die Freude*: the *Code Napoléon* translated

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[128] "De Europese hymne," Europese Unie, accessed 3 May, 2018, https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/anthem_nl.

into several languages; a Serbian dictionary by linguist Vuk Karadžič; the first newspaper in Lithuanian; a history book of the Greek nation; an Estonian national epic; Czech folk songs and nursery rhymes; the first poetry book printed in Romanian, etc. Revolutions, nationalism, and the creation of nation-states are characteristic of Europe in the nineteenth century. The wide range of objects from different countries also shows that within each region or country these changes took place within a specific social (national) context.

3.4 *Europe in Ruins (1914-1945)*: The World Wars and Totalitarianism

Moving past the age of Industrialisation, commerce, and colonialism, the visitor arrives at a shut door that initiates the third part of the exhibition and a whole new era for Europe. A replica of Gavrilo Princip's pistol that was the catalyst of the horrors of the twentieth century is displayed solitarily in the room. Showcases at the walls provide the context in which the First World War broke out, showing equipment used in the war. The complexity of the development from the shots that killed Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophia to the horrific War that shook the world is pointed out to the spectator, though the perspective through which the museum relates this history takes on a rather personal approach. As Moser explains, the division of a larger space enables visitors to be engaged on a more intimate and questioning level.[129] Personal objects such as postcards, a pipe, and a damaged Bible are displayed as treasured mementos of war and connect the overall memory of the war to individual memories. The concept of the 'unknown soldier' arose throughout Europe and the whole world, an idea that still functions today to commemorate on a national level the soldiers who have fought and died for their country. Benedict Anderson discusses the cultural significance of this phenomenon: "The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely *because* they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in times."[130] The symbolic significance of the unknown soldier therefore is a strong aspect of nationalism that can be molded and constructed to represent idealistic traits of nations and their heroes.

After the War, the exhibition describes the creation of two spheres in Europe and contrasts them against each other: totalitarianism and democracy. Democratic societies enjoyed more freedom than totalitarian Soviet Union. However, the exhibition displays that not all was well in democracies with market economies, as democracy and capitalism underwent a crisis

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[129] Stephanie Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge," 25.
[130] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 9.

when in 1929 the Great Depression hit, which resulted in mass unemployment and poverty across Europe.

3.4.1 Nazism and Stalinism: contrasted and compared

Arriving in a large room, the space is divided in on the one side the Interbellum period, displayed on sections of walls, and on the other side the comparison and contrast of Stalinism and National Socialism. Regarding the latter, videos illustrating the two ideologies are juxtaposed and projected simultaneously on large walls while the audio guide explains the images to the observer. Within the projected walls, showcases have been made, and objects are displayed on the other side of the wall as well. It provides for the visitor space to freely move around, an aspect that Moser deems is fundamental of the way displays are perceived.[131] The racial aspect of National Socialism is illustrated by objects such as an eye-colour chart for racial classification and an instrument to measure noses. Furthermore, objects from Nazi concentration camps are presented. On the Stalinism side, visitors can see mainly propaganda photos, uniforms, and some objects from Gulag camps. It should be emphasised that communism as such is not dealt with here, but that it entails specifically Stalinism. A probable reason for this is that Communism as an ideology and a belief still influences politics today, embodied by many active communist political parties. Modern communists do not want to be associated with, nor condemned by, the Stalinist terror that is ascribed to their ideology. Another reason can be that there is a difference in treating Socialism and Marxism and their derivatives as political theories on the one hand, and examine their actual implementation in a specific society and historical context on the other hand. The HEH leaves aside a comparative approach towards political theories and merely presents Stalinism and Nazism as historical phenomena by juxtaposing defined components of these ideologies.

Stalinism and National Socialism are compared and contrasted according to four factors: ideology, leadership (cult of personality), economy, and genocide and mass terror. At first glance, this comparative approach seems futile as Stalinism and Nazism are fundamentally different in the nature of their ideologies: Hitler's ethnic approach of 'cleansing' the German people and German soil of the lesser *Untermensch* differs to a great extent from Stalin's drastic economic reforms and industrialisation. However, both the political and the academic debate indicate that an a priori rejection of a comparative approach would be a loss of knowledge in the deeper understanding of both regimes. In the Prague Declaration mentioned in chapter 1.2.2,

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[131] Stephanie Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge," 24.

both the need and difficulty to compare are visible. Although the document declares that both Nazism and communism should each be judged "by their own terrible merits", it also states that "there are substantial similarities between Nazism and Communism in terms of their horrific and appalling character and their crimes against humanity."[132] This debate on the difficulty of comparing the two totalitarianisms on the one hand, and on the other hand the possible value such a comparison can bring, is ongoing with historians divided on the subject. "On the one hand, the two regimes, despite their mutual and implacable ideological enmity, appear so incredibly similar that it seems only a matter of putting the two sides together to establish their commonality. […] On the other hand, when it comes to matching up the pieces, say in terms of governance or ideology, all similarities break down radically and the sheer play of differences loses meaning."[133]

Variations exist in a comparative history of Stalinism and Nazism which depend highly on what factors have been taken into account in the analysis, and from what angle the comparison is made. The "shock and awe they elicited in their own time" is a prominent base of comparison on which the HEH has built its section on totalitarianism.[134] Another method that is important to highlight in the context of the HEH is the approach of basing the comparison on a common European history, to identify the Europeanness of these regimes and to focus on the European dimension that both regimes have.[135] These approaches to a comparative research, and by means of which the HEH has chosen to display this topic to its visitors, ties in to the 'common ground' approach, which is based upon recognition of crucial differences.[136] A strong case can be made for this approach: "When comparison is a method of scholarly enquiry, not of propaganda, there can be no logical objection to it, even if the conclusions emphasise differences more than similarities. Comparative analysis welcomes both sameness and difference."[137] Thus, when comparing several cases, a valid conclusion and valuable scholarly work can also entail that the cases are less similar than initially thought. Concerning the HEH, from a personal point of view, what seems to be the case is that the curators essentially want to

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[132] Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, June 3rd, 2008, Prague, Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.
[133] Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "After Totalitarianism – Stalinism and Nazism Compared," in *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared,* ed. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21.
[134] Ibid., 19.
[135] Ibid., 25.
[136] Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, "Introduction: The regimes and the their dictators: perspectives of comparison," in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* ed. Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 4-5.
[137] Ibid., 4.

show two totalitarian regimes that both led politics of horror in the first half of the twentieth century, and that both had as a consequence the death of millions of people.

3.4.2 Second World War

The Gulag camps and National Socialist concentration camps are juxtaposed and explained prior to the section dedicated to the Second World War in order to place National Socialism and Stalinism in the historical context in which they arose and developed.[138] What is seen as one of the key events of a common European history, and even named the negative founding myth of the European Union, is the Holocaust. One expects to find a large space loaded with objects in the presentation of the memory of the Holocaust, as it has often been ascribed this corner stone function. Nevertheless, the museum dedicates a rather small and tranquil room to the memory of the Holocaust on the fourth floor, one floor above the section on totalitarianism and the Second World War. The core of this room is not the Shoah itself, but the development and preservation of the memory of it in the post-war period. The number of objects in this room is limited and it evokes a tranquil but heavy atmosphere in which visitors are urged to reflect on the importance of remembering this horrific event of the Second World War. A centrepiece in this room is 'Josef's Coat', a coat that belonged to Holocaust survivor Josef Fränkel and which in this exhibition represents a tangible artefact that has been incorporated with other memories of the Shoah by means of images and written memories.[139]

Returning to the Second World War on the third floor, fear, dread, and horrors take on a prominent place in this part of the exhibition. Mass executions, mass deportations, food shortages and starvation, forced labour, concentration camps, the Holocaust, and bombings are all displayed in the form of objects such as bullets, food stamps, clothing, and stars of David from several countries. Remarkable is that the role of the United States, usually portrayed as Europe's saviour or at least as an important actor in European history of the twentieth century, is relatively limited: the museum focuses mainly on European actors and events that played out on the European continent. Now, the museum had the choice between ending the section of the Second World War with celebrations of Liberation Days in European countries on the one hand, or on the other hand, emphasising the horrors and linking back to the EU's founding argument of 'never again'. The latter is the case. The last room of this floor is a dark space, displaying objects in showcases in the walls. These objects are lighted sporadically, and thus when

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[138] Joanna Urbanek, meeting with curator in HEH, 25 April, 2018.
[139] House of European History, *Guidebook Permanent Exhibition* (Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union, 2017) 107.

approaching one it is quite likely that the object will be shrouded in darkness and one only sees vaguely its contours. The importance of memory is emphasised here. To end on this dark note can have several reasons. Firstly, the end of the Second World War was not for all countries a liberation or a mark for political freedom. Especially in Central and Eastern Europe (and in the Baltics) a new era of occupation had started. Secondly, large parts of countries that had seen battle or bombings were in ruins. Thirdly, the costly war had devastated economies which needed to be build up again. And lastly, in the aftermath of the War it became clear how big the toll on human lives it had. Concentration camps were opened, displaced people tried to find their homes, family members and friends were missing, and traumas emerged. Europe needed to be rebuilt and the horrors of the first half of the twentieth century should never happen again.

3.5 Rebuilding a Divided Continent (1945-1970s)

The subsequent period after the Second World War is marked by hunger, ruins, reconstruction, opposing ideologies and the rise of the rivalry of the United States and the Soviet Union, resulting in a clearly delineated east-west divide and the Cold War in which direct confrontation could be avoided. However, in this period there was the constant fear that a 'hot war' could break out any day. The direct aftermath of the 1940s also marked the start of European integration that led to the European Union we know today. The official guidebook of the HEH states: "United by a fear of communism, some Western European countries began the path of co-operation at a supranational level in order to tame nationalism and dismantle the risk of war."[140] It is thus on this floor that the first steps of European integration are presented and discussed.

When ascending the stairs, the visitor encounters images of rubble and ruins, and an alley containing propaganda posters and protest banners. In the middle of the alley, visitors can find the first stages of European integration, which will be discussed in the next paragraph. The division of Europe is highlighted in the 1956 revolts in Budapest, and the Prague Spring in 1968, in which calls for change were quelled and the West did not intervene. However, the exhibition also stresses that this east-west divide as two ideological homogenous blocs is not accurate, as the actual situation was more complex than that. The second half of the twentieth century would see dictatorial regimes in Spain, Portugal and Greece. This complex ideological state of affairs is illustrated by a cartoon about the hi-jacking of the Portuguese passenger liner 'Santa Maria' by Portuguese and Spanish opponents of the dictatorships that ruled the Iberian

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[140] House of European History, *Guidebook Permanent Exhibition,* 76.

Peninsula. The meaning of this cartoon in the exhibition is to demonstrate similar values in different political-geographic contexts. The cartoon states that if those so-called rebels would have come from the other side of the Iron Curtain, instead of the Iberian Peninsula, they would have been hailed as 'freedom fighters'.[141]

3.5.1 First steps of European integration

In the context of the Cold War, the shift in global powers, and the aftermath of the Second World War in the form of rebuilding countries and dealing with personal loss, concrete plans for a small-scale European cooperation were drawn up. The HEH treats the topic of European integration in the form of 'milestones': every notable year in the history of European integration has a pillar dedicated to it which explains what happened that year, illustrated by one or several objects. The first milestone presented is the Congress of Europe in The Hague, which is considered the first federal step in European history. It is explained that the aim for the first step towards European cooperation flows from the turbulent first half of the twentieth century and has as its goal the prevention of war. To achieve this goal, the second pillar introduces the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. Coal and steel were resources to wage war and to rebuild countries and their economies in a post-war setting. To set up this supranational body to regulate coal and steel would ensure that no country (especially Germany) would be able to set up a strong military that would challenge the rest of Europe. These gradual steps in the development of European economic and political integration were made cautiously, as is symbolized by the ingot symbolizing the Schuman plan. This ingot shows the word 'EUROP' (not 'Europe' according to French, and neither 'Europa' according to German, Dutch and Italian) and is an example of the compromising nature of the ECSC.[142]

Nevertheless, from its early stages on, the European integration project was met with diverging views on how far the integration should go. The next pillar explains the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954. Strongly dependent on global threats and the political situation (Cold War, Korean War) this plan was drawn up in an uncertain time and would enable Germany to remilitarize under a supranational, supervisional body. However, especially France was against the idea of Germany having an army again and so the plans for the EDC were wiped from the table. The next milestone describes the Rome Treaties signed in

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[141] House of European History, *Guidebook Permanent Exhibition,* 86.
[142] "Milestones of European Integration I," House of European History, accessed 21 May, 2018, https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/permanent-exhibition/rebuilding-divided-continent.

1957 by 'the Six' (the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Italy, West Germany and France) which established the European Economic Committee (EEC) and Euratom.

Having past the first wave of pillars and milestones of European integration, the visitor arrives at an open cabinet holding the busts of the so-called 'Founding Fathers', or as they are called here 'European architects'. Alongside the busts is one personal item to personalize the figures and to make their personalities more tangible and approachable. Whereas in *C'est notre histoire!* the Founding Fathers played a key role in the narrative of European integration, in the HEH the emphasis on these figures is less strong. Their importance for the integration project is highlighted, but in terms of the space dedicated to them and the way they are presented (one bust plus one personal item), they do not occupy a particularly prominent place.

The next milestone is the Common Agriculture Policy in 1962. The collaboration on Europe's food production was a complex project that resulted in on the one hand efficient production and fair prices for the farmers, and on the other hand large surpluses that in some cases amounted to the destruction of excess produce, which then again led to protests.[143] One year later, in 1963, the Élysée Treaty was signed, which symbolized closer ties between France and Germany. Being two pivotal countries in the EEC, the treaty was a vital step for a more united Europe, as French president Charles De Gaulle and German chancellor Konrad Adenauer officially put an end to centuries of Franco-German hostilities and suspicion. A bronze sculpture depicting two shaking hands illustrates this new Franco-German friendship. In 1973, the Six countries became nine with the first accession round in which the United Kingdom finally joined the EEC, alongside Ireland and Denmark. The people of Norway decided not to join. Both posters from the Norwegian referendum of 1972 against accession, and the British referendum of 1975 to stay in the EEC are displayed, indicating the role that the European people can play.[144]

3.5.2 Social security

Once moved past the first milestones of European integration, the subject of social security enjoys a relatively large space with a living room atmosphere. In this space, subjects such as housing, healthcare, education, mobility, and consumption are presented as important developments in the 1950s and 1960s. A carpet on the floor and a large round table with seats in the middle of the room enhance a certain intimate atmosphere. Against the walls are

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[143] House of European History, *Guidebook Permanent Exhibition,* 94.
[144] Ibid., 96.

showcases containing objects that illustrate the aforementioned topics. On the left part of the room, the developments as they occurred on the western side of the Iron Curtain are displayed, while the right part is dedicated in a similar way to the eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Thus, the visitor can take on a comparative approach to discover what was similar and what was different in the two spheres. What immediately strikes the visitor is an old Zastava 750 from Yugoslavia 1978 on the right side of the room. Visitors can enter this car to travel back in time as it were and experience mobility and early touristic adventures, while listening on the radio to music of the time.

3.6 *Shattering Certainties (1970s-today)*: Further European integration

The next part of the exhibition describes a new period of the twentieth century. Objects and posters that show political change and the rise of new social movements are displayed on walls, in walls, and behind walls. As is the case in most of the exhibition spaces, there is not a specific direction of movement that visitors must follow, since they are free to wander past and around the walls themselves. In the midst of these turbulent times, the European boom came to end and skepticism arose. The oil crisis of the 70s caused for a stagnation of economic growth. The decline of the Soviet Union the following years and the largely peaceful revolutions in Soviet-ruled states, led to the crumbling of the Iron Curtain, culminating into the famous images of the night of 9 November 1989 in Berlin.

The oil crisis made the European integration project painfully aware of its weaknesses, and enthusiasm for the project waned. It is in this context that the second series of milestones is presented, starting with the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in Helsinki in 1975. In contrast to the first section of milestones that enjoyed a central place in the room, this second part of important moments is not placed in the center, but at the side. An ink blotter made of silver used for the signing of the Helsinki Final Act is displayed in the first pillar. For the European Community, this Act was important in the sense that guarantees on human rights were introduced for which the Soviet Union signed (in return for its acknowledgement as a sovereign power and recognition of its territorial gains). Then, the year 1979 saw the first European Parliamentary elections in which citizens of member states could directly influence who would represent them in this supranational body. The EP, however, had merely a consultative function and thus no real power, but since 1979 it gradually increased its powers. In 1985, the second accession round saw the expansion of the European Community from nine to twelve countries. Greece, Spain, and Portugal had all thrown off the shackles of dictatorship

and sought the inclusion and protection of their newly gained democratic values. Around seven years later, in 1992, the European Single Market came into shape, and marked an important moment in European integration. The 'Four Freedoms' (freedom of people, capital, goods, and services) which characterize the EU today, were installed. A tangible example of these freedoms is the European passport, of which several are displayed in the showcase within the pillar.

Behind the elevator, in a relatively small passage, one encounters several television screens placed next to each other hanging on the wall. The year is 1989 and each screen displays the build up to the events that would eventually lead to the fall of communist rule. Images of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia depicting the jingling of keys with the purpose of letting the Russians know that it was time to go home, as well as of the Baltic Chain, a human chain that connected the three capitals of the Baltic states, show unified peoples protesting (peacefully) against the Soviet rule. The HEH does well in showing the visitors, especially those of whom communism is not directly part of his or her (national) history, what was going on behind the Curtain and how citizens got involved. As 1989 is an extremely important year for European history, these videos deserve a more prominent place in the exhibition. However, this choice of space can also add to the visitor's perception, as Moser states: "small galleries offer "stories" that can be engaged with on a more personal and questioning level."[145] The exhibition continues in an optimistic way, but also stresses that for Yugoslavia peaceful times and reconciliation had not yet been met.

The next part is dedicated to the third wave of milestones of European integration. A large white table is placed in the center of the space, with at each corner a glass showcase containing an object that illustrates the milestone presented. The 80.000 pages of EU law, the so-called *acquis communautaire*, is spread out in the middle of the table, and the importance of the implementation of common laws is emphasized. Within the white table, glass cases have been made to provide more space for objects to illustrate the context of the period of European integration concerned. Overall, this part of the exhibition expresses order with a hint of strictness. The first milestone discussed here is the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and the implementation of a common currency. The next milestone is the continuous enlargement of the EU in 1995, 2004, 2007, and finally 2013, which doubled the number of the EU's member states. In this part it also becomes clear that the accession to the EU and the legislation that comes with it, was not always accepted without struggles. A referendum was held in Poland

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[145] Stephanie Moser, "The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge," 25.

whether to access the EU, with groups campaigning for both sides. Sweden and the UK were exempt from adopting the Euro as a currency.

The next milestone represents 1995, when Europeans could move freely from one country to another with the implementation of the Schengen Agreement. Number plates that have the EU flag alongside the country identifier illustrate this freedom of movement. The year 2005 saw the formal approval of a European Constitution, which was halted however by the negative outcomes of referendums in both France and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, elements of the rejected constitution were put in a reform treaty to be called the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force throughout the whole EU in 2009. A 'European Constitution signing-event chair' is put on display to illustrate this event. Also depicted in the exhibition is the euro crisis starting in 2008 and the Euroscepticism deriving from that.

The exhibition continues to explain several aspects of common European experiences, such as the Euro as a physical presence of the EU; anti-EU protests; the homogenization of the way of living throughout the EU; a free/single market; trans-European networks, like low flight prices and free roaming; and the freedom to work across borders, with both its positive and negative consequences. The fact that anti-EU protests (symbolized by a Greek flag with the Greek word for no – 'όχι', in big red graffiti letters for the bailout referendum) have a place in the HEH is explained as a paradox: anti-EU protests are also part of these common European experiences.

3.7 Accolades and criticism

The last floor of the exhibition is dedicated to the visitor: "Now it's over to you! This gallery is about your opinions! What is Europe? What makes you feel 'European'? What is our European heritage? If you are a visitor from outside Europe, what are your perspectives of Europe and Europeans?"[146] In contrast to the other floors, this fifth and last floor of the permanent exhibition entails a relative large open space; there is room for a lot more here. It gives a sense of incompleteness, and of development. Objects and artwork from outside Europe depict encounters with Europeans and give a brief insight on how non-Europeans (physically) perceived for example the Dutch or the Portuguese.

In addition to the non-European (historical) perspective on Europeans, another topic discussed on this floor, and which already came to the fore in the previous section, is criticism

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[146] House of European History, *Pocket Guide Permanent Exhibition* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017) 18.

on the EU. In 2012 the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize "for its contribution to the promotion of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe for more than six decades."[147] The EU had transformed Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace.[148] However, the award of this prize was debated on several levels, such as economic suffering of EU citizens, and controversial cooperation with Libya regarding migrants.

Questions are being asked on the future of Europe: whether the EU continues to exist; whether it shall grow or shrink; and whether Europe's borders are fixed now or will change in the future.[149] A small section is dedicated to the city of Brussels: a four-times capital in Europe. The visitor can rest on a bench that bends in the shape of a large circle, while looking at a massive circular projection on the ceiling, and contemplate 'Europe'. Images of architecture, religion, pop culture, and history are some of the themes that pass by and which most Europeans find familiar. It is the idea that on this bench the visitor can reflect on what Europe means for them, and in what way he or she feels affiliated with it.

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[147] House of European History, *Guidebook Permanent Exhibition,* 155.
[148] "European Union receives Nobel Peace Prize 2012," European Union, accessed 30 May, 2018, https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history/2010-today/2012/eu-nobel_en.
[149] House of European History, *Guidebook Permanent Exhibition,* 156.

4 Public Opinion of the Permanent Exhibition

Since the HEH had opened barely a year when this research was done, not many reviews or reports were published about its permanent exhibition. Both positive and optimistic, and less positive articles can be found. Among the sceptic newspaper articles discussing the museum's price tag, some short articles appeared, examining the content of the exhibition. The most thorough report available at the time of this research, was by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, which will be further discussed in the next section.

4.1 The Platform of European Memory and Conscience

On the 30th of October 2017 the Platform of European Memory and Conscience published a report on the permanent exhibition of the HEH. The Platform is a Czech based, non-profit international non-governmental organization which brings together 57 public and private organizations from 20 (European and non-European) countries.[150] Its focus lies on European history, with special attention to raising public awareness on and opening up discussions about totalitarian rule.[151] In August 2017, nineteen experts in the fields of commemoration, remembrance, and history participated in the study trip to the HEH of which the aforementioned report was the final product.[152] The Platform opens fire on the then newly opened exhibition by stating:

> In the opinion of the Platform, the message of the exhibition in the House of European History is influenced by an ideological Hegelian or neo-Marxist interpretation of European history used. It creates a strong impression of the inevitable evolution and progress of European history after the French Revolution (1789) toward the ideal of a classless society. There are some points that can be read as sympathy towards Communism (!). As one of the participants commented it: „too much comment, too few objects". This refers also to data and numbers.[153]

The Platform goes on to further analyze the exhibition, pointing out a great number of aspects that, according to them, are missing in the different sections, such as a definition of

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[150] "About the Platform," Platform of European Memory and Conscience, accessed 9 June, 2018, https://www.memoryandconscience.eu/about-the-platfor/about-the-platform/.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Platform of European Memory and Conscience, "The House of European History. Report on the Permanent Exhibition," 30 October, 2017, 2.
[153] Platform of European Memory and Conscience, "The House of European History. Report on the Permanent Exhibition," 3.

totalitarianism, the Holodomor, and an explanation of the Gulag phenomenon.[154] Furthermore, the Platform presents eleven factual mistakes which range from basic translation and carelessness in meticulous formulations, to graver errors. The Report concludes on the note that the Museum fails at presenting European history in three dimensions: structure ("Too short presentation of the roots of European unity and the history of the continent before 1789. It is too much focused on the political perspective. Too little interest and attention for the perspective of medium-sized and small countries."[155]); concept (the exhibition focuses too little on common values and ties, and it does not present the criminal nature of Communist rule in a satisfactory way); and finally, facts (the exhibition shows an ideological bias by omitting to mention certain Communist crimes).[156]

When analyzing the report of the Platform, one has to take into account the perspective with which the organization approaches the museum. It seems that the views and intentions of the HEH and the Platform differ greatly: where the Platform wants to see a more radical condemnation of Communism, the HEH offers a narrative which addresses a more neutral stance which is open to interpretation. The latter distinguishes between Stalinism and Communism, since Marxism has been used in many different ways and is still used in today's politics, whereas the former argues that "it was not „Stalinism" which presented totalitarian ideology [but Communism], in the same way as there was not any „Hitlerism" [but Nazism]."[157] The Platform struggles to understand the meaning of the permanent exhibition as a reservoir for European history and memory, and approaches the exhibition with a limited view. It could be stated that it somehow takes advantage of the opportunity that the HEH provides with this exhibition for excessive criticism. It does not seem to be the intention of the HEH to speak sympathetically about the crimes of communism. On the contrary, the HEH exhibits these events in a contained critical way for visitors to draw their own conclusions. This approach, of course, will always be subject to criticism, as specific groups will always feel like certain atrocities are downplayed.

The remark that the permanent exhibition would portray a Hegelian, teleological story of European history as moving towards a specific end, like the Platform argued, has been rejected by the HEH itself.[158] According to the museum, the topic of European integration needs

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[154] Platform of European Memory and Conscience, "The House of European History. Report on the Permanent Exhibition," 8.
[155] Ibid., 13.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid., 5.
[158] Andrea Mork, "Presentation of the House of European History," *'European Remembrance' Symposium, Gdánsk*, 15 September, 2012, 4.

an explanation of long-term historical developments that provided the context for the present-day Europe.[159] Since the exhibition starts with an introductory room called *Shaping Europe* in which past and ancient ideas on what Europe is, and what lies at the core of European heritage and memory, the danger of ignoring pre-1789 ideas and events that had an impact on how we perceive Europe (such as the portrayal on maps) is circumvented.

4.2 Public awareness and the media

In the construction process of the House it was mentioned that "the construction of a transnational, pan-European memory should take place through a process of communication, in the light of public discussion […]." However, during the building process, public debate about the museum was prevented "to avoid political controversies and secure funding for the HEH in the EP."[160] Taja Vovk van Gaal, director of the Academic Project Team, provided in an article about the HEH the possible reasoning for the choices regarding putting the museum in the middle of public debate:

> There is no ideal recipe for how to deal with public concerns when such a large-scale project is launched. Insofar as the appropriateness and timing of this initiative is concerned, recent failures (Dutch National History Museum, Maison de l'Histoire de France) invite caution. In each of these latter cases the initiative was abandoned after endless public debates about the political nature of the project and the legitimacy of spending public funds for that purpose […]. But in other instances, it was shown that the discussions ceased as soon as the museum was opened – as in the case of German institutions that experienced then a huge public success […].[161]

The media now plays an important role for the HEH concerning both good or bad reviewing, and visibility. Newspaper articles about the museum are being read by its staff, and special attention is paid to criticism. One topic that returns in the media on the permanent exhibition is the lack of attention given to religion (also a point of critique by the Platform).[162] It is true that religion with all its aspects like the cultural, political, architectural, does not appear

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[159] Andrea Mork, "Presentation of the House of European History," *'European Remembrance' Symposium, Gdánsk*, 15 September, 2012, 4.

[160] Wolfram Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55, no. 3 (2017) 519.

[161] Taja Vovk van Gaal, "The House of European History," in *Entering the Minefields: the Creation of New History Museums in Europe,* ed. Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont & Chantal Kesteloot (Linköping University Electronic Press, 2012, http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp_home/index.en.aspx?issue=083) 48.

[162] Arnold Huijgen, "The House of European History Erases Religion – OpEd," *Eurasia Review,* 27 June, 2017, https://www.eurasiareview.com/27062017-the-house-of-european-history-erases-religion-oped/ ; Platform of European Memory and Conscience, "The House of European History. Report on the Permanent Exhibition," 5.

prominently. Christian values – opposed to the Islamic Ottomans and the Moors – are deemed to be inherent to Europe and play a big part in its history. It can be stated that religion has contributed greatly to shape the Europe that we know today.

5 A second look at the exhibition

5.1 Eastern and western memory

When moving through the permanent exhibition of the HEH, it becomes clear that European history until the second half of the twentieth century is portrayed in an inclusive way. The focus lies mainly on facets of European history that can be recognized in all corners of Europe. Objects and references to countries from all parts of Europe are mentioned and placed throughout the floors of the exhibition, but a gradual split comes into being when approaching the comparison and contrast of Nazism and Stalinism. Although it is clear that every region of Europe saw its own unique course of events in history, one of the focus points of this research lies on the distinctive ways history is perceived and historical memory is shaped in eastern and western Europe. This chasm in historiography culminates particularly during and after the Second World War. From this turning point on, it is not possible to narrate European history based only on common events that had an impact in both spheres, as was the approach in the museum prior to this section, since a physical, political border was put into place.

To highlight the similarities and differences in the scope of the parallel historical context in which these totalitarianisms developed, can result in a broader understanding of the political, economic, and social backgrounds which led to the horrors of the two regimes. Moreover, "in understanding and making sense of the two, we gain a crucial vista into twentieth century history that on their own neither of the two national histories can produce."[163] To see the two regimes juxtaposed and paralleled in the permanent exhibition of the HEH embodies this idea of stepping over self-limiting national borders and approach history from a transnational perspective in order to gain novel insights and to add new arguments to debates.

It can be argued that these two regimes represent a schism in European memory, namely the memory of the Holocaust on the one hand and the memory of the Gulag on the other hand. Not in the sense of which one is worse or which one prevails where, as some countries like Poland have a double legacy of dictatorship, but in the sense of how to deal with these memories, especially in the setting of talking about a common European history and memory. The HEH takes on a 'contrast-and-compare' approach in its interpretation of European history, which has its logics because it underlines 'unity in diversity'. Both regimes had a great impact on a large part of the European continent, and that impact still lives vividly in the minds of people who experienced them first hand. This history is still very recent and is also kept alive

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[163] Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "After Totalitarianism – Stalinism and Nazism Compared," 26.

by sons and daughters who listened to the stories their parents or grandparents told them about living in the time of Hitler or in the time of Stalin. These first hand recollections of ordinary citizens are prominent in for example the House of Terror in Budapest. Video and audio material of emotional, dramatic stories describe the horror of Hungarians under communist oppression. In the exposition *C'est notre histoire!*, the voices of EU citizens were heard as well. It is noteworthy therefore that the HEH does not include so directly the voices of Europeans. As explained in chapter 1.1.5 the use of such an exhibition medium can prove to be problematic and controversial, and it is possible that the HEH learned from the difficulties of this medium in *C'est notre histoire!*.

To 'contrast and compare' seems a valuable method when dealing with these histories, as it allows for enough space to address the matters in their own specific context. Moreover, it also enables a possibility of identifying commonalities between the two seemingly different spheres and thus draw on a sense of recognition and solidarity. The fact that the agenda of eastern European history had to be pushed forward by advocates, illustrates the apparent lack of mutual understanding of representatives of eastern and western memory. Therefore, this project that the HEH has taken on, is highly valuable in the debate on what to include in a common European history. Especially Poland has expressed its concerns regarding the narrative that the HEH presents. The country's deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and National Heritage Piotr Glinski sent a letter to the EP's President Antonio Tajani stating that significant historical facts in the HEH are portrayed in a non-objective way, and that events relating to Poland in particular have been distorted.[164] Furthermore, the Platform for European Memory and Heritage also urges for more political interference, as it states in the concluding paragraph of their Report on the exhibition that "it needs a deep debate on the plenary meeting of the Parliament. A panel of experts should be nominated by different political groups and MEPs from different regions of the EU to evaluate and consequently propose changes."[165] However, the scientific independence of the Academic Team of the HEH ensures that neither Tajani nor Glinski can exercise direct power over the permanent exhibition of the museum.[166]

Overall, the HEH addresses eastern and western memory in a diplomatic way although it can be argued that it is far from perfect. Politics is eager to intervene in this sensitive part of

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[164] "PM Glinski: EP museum distorts historical truth," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Poland, 16 October, 2017, accessed 16 June, 2018, http://www.poland.gov.pl/history/history-poland/pm-glinski-ep-museum-distorts-historical-truth/.

[165] Platform of European Memory and Conscience, "The House of European History. Report on the Permanent Exhibition," 14.

[166] Constanze Itzel, meeting with Museum Director in HEH, 25 April, 2018.

history. One must take into consideration that concerning time, space, and content, the HEH must put limits due to realistic circumstances. Since only one room is dedicated to totalitarianism, curators had to think about how to depict this matter in a way that fits to the museum's idea of presenting a reservoir for European memory, a source for interpretation.

5.2 European integration

What place does European integration have in the permanent exhibition of the House of European History, set up and financed by the European Parliament? Initially, as described in the Conceptual basis, the post Second World War period and the process of European integration would be the focus of the exhibition.[167] However, discussions were held about this conceptual basis and it was decided to expand the exhibition more to the nineteenth century in order to understand the twentieth century, and thus the historical context of European integration.[168] This decision also allowed a wider inclusion of countries, as the European integration process of the twentieth century mostly entails only a handful of countries and leaves out almost half of the countries that are part of the EU today. The HEH opted for a chronological narrative with a thematic approach: the theme of European integration flows through and alongside other historical events. The three clusters of milestones start at the third floor of the permanent exhibition (the fourth floor on the floor plan), therefore already half way through the exhibition. Wolfram Kaiser has examined the development of the HEH project from its start in 2007 to "the present day" (i.e. 2017).[169] He pinpoints this change of the initial ideas when he talks about the narrative of the HEH as being "East Europeanized" and the history of the European integration process as marginalized.[170] This indeed seems to be the case when comparing the current permanent exhibition to the initial concept.

The roots of the plan to open a pan-European history platform spring from mainly German Christian Democrats. The EP gave the full responsibility of the concept to experts and academics, and did not intend to meddle in the plan politically. This academic independence is also something that the staff of the HEH highly values and stresses.[171] Moreover, the interference of politics in history writing has a negative connotation in present day societies, thinking of the heritage of the twentieth century. Especially intentions of the supranational EU

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[167] Committee of Experts House of European History, *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History*, 8.

[168] Constanze Itzel, meeting with Museum Director in HEH, 25 April, 2018.

[169] Wolfram Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project."

[170] Ibid., 518.

[171] Constanze Itzel and Joanna Urbanek, meeting with Museum Director and curator in HEH, 25 April, 2018.

to form a metaphysical idea of European citizenship (the legal aspect is already there) are highly scrutinized and criticized. The result is that the European institutions are constrained in their history politics, and that is why in the case of the HEH the competences have been handed over completely to the academic team and the project team: "the EP has been so sensitive to the possible accusation of wasting taxpayers' money on a prestige propaganda project to tell a teleological story about European integration that it relied entirely on the curators and professional historians […] to legitimize its museum as one that conforms to prevailing curatorial and historical standards."[172] The legitimization and support of the HEH depends also on the background of the team members, which is described elsewhere in this thesis.

A challenge of presenting the history of European integration is the importance of historical, political, economic, and social context. For example, the context of the EDC is important to keep in mind when trying to understand the decisions made, and to fully grasp the meaning and the happenings of the event, one needs to dive deep into its literature. This applies to virtually all milestones presented. The separate pillars that the HEH dedicates to the milestones of European integration show a rather superficial aspect of the subject and generally leave the visitor with only half the story. The HEH has the space to explain European integration more thoroughly, but decided to focus more on Europe's modern history since the French Revolution. This has been a very consciously made decision as explained earlier. As seen in prior exhibitions with European integration as a theme, presenting the topic in an appealing way still seems a difficulty historians and curators struggle with. Moreover, it is fair to say that a museum that claims to be dedicated to all Europeans is difficult to justify if most of the museum deals with only Western European countries. The 'House of European History' is not called the 'House of European Union History'.

Finally, while the HEH includes innovative ideas on the presentation of European history as a whole, specific parts can be of less interest to people who are not familiar with the political initiatives towards a unified Europe. What can you display in these so-called 'milestones' in order to attract attention? Probably, not just relevant remnants like newspaper articles, plain and dry treaties, or cartoons. Likewise, stamps and signatures are not very effective in bringing across the message, because they are quite static objects. They do not speak directly to the people. A poster, document, or an office ornament that was in some way involved in political decision-making is not so exciting. There have been many EEC/EU meetings over the last sixty years, in which a lot of signatures were placed and treaties drawn up. To present

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[172] Wolfram Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project," 520.

them, or replicas of them, does not tickle the visitor's curiosity nor does it play on his or her emotions.

However, in other parts of the HEH not focused on the milestones of European integration, the museum manages to balance the effect of static objects with other ones that require further interaction. For example, the postcards of the second world war, the bible with a bullet in it, or the videos of the peaceful revolutions in the former Communist states can draw out feelings of curiosity, happiness, sadness, unity, and perhaps even nostalgia. The Zastava 750 brings the visitor back to the 1970s and in that way also draws on the senses. Displaying the history of European integration has always been a challenge, as for most European citizens it has been perceived as a distant process that did not involve them. Accordingly, it could be said that the HEH still has to surpass this obstacle. Nevertheless, on a positive note, having spoken with members of the curatorial team, it became clear that the HEH is open towards constructive criticism. Therefore, one can expect a functional solution to the difficulties involved in parts of the permanent exhibition, such as the milestones of European integration.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to answer the question of how the House of European History constructs the story of a European narrative. To be able to answer this question in a more targeted way, two focus points that are of great significance in the debate about a common European history were selected, namely (i) the differing histories of Central and Eastern Europe opposed to Western Europe in a post-WWII setting; and (ii) the history of European integration in the twentieth century.

Regarding the first focus point, Central and Eastern European history and memory are crucial components of the HEH and, whereas its place within a common European history has often been underscored and debated, constitute an integral part of the museum. In over-arching parts of the museum such as nationalism and the World Wars, Central and Eastern European histories are placed alongside the rest of Europe, although in other sections, mainly post-World War II, those histories are overall juxtaposed, compared and contrasted, in relation to the rest of Europe. As became clear from all sources, the incorporation of Central and Eastern European history and memory shifted the whole project from a museum dedicated to mainly European integration, to a wider European history museum. The significance of the museum's name could have contributed to this change in course, as it transmits the idea of an inclusive European historic narrative. Hence, we can talk about a 'House of European History' and not a 'House of European Integration History'. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Central and Eastern history does not mean that the debate has ended. Małgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak demonstrate the intrinsic complications, voiced in for example the report drawn up by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, that draw out questions such as whether there is a 'correct' way to address Central and Eastern European history and memory in a pan-European setting.

Within the chronological narrative with a thematic approach that the HEH uses to demonstrate the European narrative, European integration is one of the themes that has been spread out within their respective historical context. There is not one room solely dedicated to European integration, but the narrative is approached in a broader, historical sense. This has several implications. On the one hand, to present European integration in the form of separate milestones, displayed in glass columns throughout the exhibition, gives a good historical perspective of Europe from the second half of the twentieth century on. To take the topic of European integration out of its historical context would probably undermine the potential that the HEH has in order to stir the visitor's interest and to transmit knowledge. On the other hand, the milestone-approach can obscure the realization of a comprehensive overview of European

integration, as the attention of the visitor jumps from one historical event to another, integration-related or not. Moreover, the glass columns are easy to skip as well.

History and memory are notions that intersect within this museum, since it encapsulates the history of the continent and presents it as a new perspective to its inhabitants: as a common history. What does not belong to the local or national collective memory, might be added to a broader type of memory, a collective European memory. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, history is a more tangible concept than memory. It is clear that the HEH is cautious, rendering it possible that a top-down EU institution can easily be accused of transmitting propaganda messages with the taxpayer's money. Within the context of the HEH, at least two goals can be distinguished. Firstly, the political goal of the museum, supported by the European Parliament, can be to nourish and reinforce in a way European identity. Identity, however, is a much more confined term than memory; although it is a concept that is constantly developing, it is also a concept that people, or states, attribute to themselves. Memory can be used as a tool to shape identity. Susan Sontag argues that there is no common memory, because this 'ideological' usage of memory has been imposed or established. She states that there is only the highly personal, individual memory.[173] The creation of national narratives in the nineteenth century, the glorification of national heroes, and the installation of national holidays are all tools to shape and create a national identity. In light of this, European memory is not definable either; it is a concept that is in the minds and emotions of Europeans, and it is highly dependent on factors such as nationality, education, level of mobility, environment, and personal experiences. Of course, memory can be shaped to a certain extent by influencing some of these factors, but still the perceptions and interpretations that people take on differ highly from another. The second goal is educative, from the perspective of the Academic Team. Identity politics is not explicitly pursued in the permanent exhibition, but is not possible to ignore either. The goal that the HEH itself states is the following: "Instead of giving fixed answers, the House of European History wants to stimulate public discussion of European memory and consciousness."[174]

Statements like the one above express the duality of the HEH. On the one hand it is a museum space with a given exposition – it is a product of its time. On the other hand, its most valuable function is the creation of a metaphoric space, a domain where certain questions are posed. The museum does not begin nor start at its well-guarded doors, but moves around in the public sphere as well, dwelling around the concept of 'a common European history'. Within

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[173] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 67-68.
[174] "Questions and answers about the House of European History," *House of European History,* accessed 30 June, 2018, https://historia-europa.ep.eu/sites/default/files/assets/qa_en_2017.pdf.

the museum, visitors can move around freely and interpret the object themselves. However, the larger purpose and function of the museum is to create the topic of discussion, not define it. This act of creation is important in itself, since by creating/constructing it, it therefore exists. The museum does not explicitly define what constitutes a common European history, but it constructs a space (metaphoric and literal) to debate European history. It is true that, at the same time, the act of creation leaves its marks and may abstain from total neutrality. Nevertheless, the HEH does not lead visitors to a specific definition as it gives a lot of freedom. It is through creating the space and opening up the debate that a common European history is created. The HEH does not present itself as the holder of an unquestionable truth, but participates in the debate and creates the space and forum where a common European history can be shaped and discussed. Therefore, the museum's own existence is a statement in itself.

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