

# Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project\*

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## Abstract

Concerned about the EU's apparent lack of cultural legitimacy, EU institutions have increasingly engaged in the transnational politics of history to enhance European identity and foster EU legitimacy. The House of European History museum project in Brussels marks a high point in the European Parliament's history politics. Based on document analysis and interviews, an analysis of the project's origins and evolution highlights the narrow limits of cultural engineering from above, by EU institutions, however. The constraining dissensus in EU politics has forced the European Parliament to rely entirely on the curators and professional historians to legitimize its museum as one that conforms to prevailing curatorial and historical standards. As a result, the first permanent exhibition differs markedly from the original plan. Its narrative has become East Europeanized and the history of European integration proper has been marginalized.

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**Keywords:** European Union; European Parliament; politics of history; House of European History

## Introduction

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‘A single museum to include and represent European civilization ... would need to be shaped by genius, not by a committee’ – this is how Kenneth Hudson, a British curator and museum entrepreneur, conceived of a museum of European history back in 1997 (cited in Vovk van Gaal and Itzel 2012, 77). Museum by committee it shall be, nevertheless concluded Hans-Gert Pöttering, then President of the European Parliament (EP), when he first proposed the creation of such a museum in 2007 and charged a Committee of Experts with drafting a plan for a structure and narrative for it. This House of European History (HEH), as it has become known, is currently scheduled to open in Brussels in the Spring of 2017.

The HEH as a major cultural institution to be housed in the Eastman Building close to the EP is a key project for attempts by EU institutions since the 1980s to strengthen the cultural basis for integration, enhance European identity and foster the legitimacy of the EU. The transformation from a permissive consensus, which characterized the first 25 years of ‘core Europe’ integration, to what has recently been coined ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), and the rise of euroscepticism appear to require such EU activism to shape a collective identity among citizens to protect the EU. Whereas the EU’s activism initially focussed on strengthening the organisation’s symbolic properties (Manners, 2011), the Commission and the EP have increasingly concentrated on co-shaping the transnational politics of history – initiatives geared towards fostering the formation and dissemination of more aligned and consensual narratives. The focus here is particularly on the highly divisive 20th-century European history – particularly following the 2004 Eastern enlargement, when memory entrepreneurs – actors who actively seek to shape remembrance policies and collective memory – from Eastern Europe began to challenge the emerging Western European elite consensus around notions of the singularity of the Holocaust and post-war ‘core Europe’ integration as a peace project (Mälksoo, 2009).

The European Commission has run, among other initiatives, the ‘Active European Remembrance’ programme (Littoz-Monnet, 2012). It has also managed the project ‘New Narrative for Europe’ initiated by the EP and geared towards developing a new storyline to legitimize European integration and the EU (Kaiser, 2015). The EP has increasingly become involved in history politics as an institutional memory entrepreneur (Kaiser, 2012; Neumayer, 2015). It has passed several resolutions on European history, especially on the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the start of the Second World War in 1939 (European Parliament, 2009), which introduced 23 August as a Europe-wide so-called Remembrance Day ‘for victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes’. The HEH now marks a high point of the EP’s activism. It seems that the process of Europeanisation was ‘looking for a museal form’, as Claus Leggewie observed when Pöttering made his proposal (cited in Assmann *et al.*, 2008, p. 78). The EP President was in any case keen to give it that particular form.

Using process tracing (see, for example, Vennesson and Wiesner, 2014) this article examines the development of the HEH project from its origins in 2007 through to the present-day. It is based on the analysis of documents and interviews with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), members of the Academic Committee and the team of curators who have been preparing the first permanent exhibition since 2011. The article compares the two phases in the project’s development sequentially: the first phase from 2007 through to the submission of the Committee of Experts’ report, ‘Conceptual Basis for a House of European History’ published at the end of 2008 (Committee of Experts, 2008); and the implementation phase from 2010 onwards. This phase saw the nomination of an Academic Committee with a changed composition, and the recruitment and work of the team of curators to realize the actual permanent exhibition for the HEH’s opening.

From the first to the second phase the project has undergone substantial changes in regard to the dominant actors, the preferred process of deliberation about the contents and the resulting

narrative. The project's origins were dominated by a micro-network of Catholic German Christian Democrats. During the second phase, however, the EP gave the team of curators and the Academic Committee a lot of leeway to change the original plans for the museum. At no point did the EP seek to exert direct influence over the museum's content and narrative. The plan's initiators and the EP Bureau measured the project's 'success' purely in terms of securing strong EP majority support for it, its actual implementation and the opening of the museum.

Moreover, during the first phase the Committee of Experts advocated instigating a broad political and public debate about the museum, its content and narrative. In contrast, Pöttering and his successors colluded with the team of curators and the Academic Committee in the second phase to prevent any public debate about the museum at all to avoid political controversies and secure funding for the HEH in the EP.

The Committee of Experts, finally, advocated a *longue durée* representation of the history of Europe since Antiquity, which would still have centred on post-war European integration. In contrast, the permanent exhibition has shifted the focus to the short-term perspective on Europe since the 19th century. However, (Western) European integration proper has become marginalized.

The activism of EU institutions in the cultural field has been analyzed as attempts at top-down cultural engineering (Shore, 2000) comparable to 19th-century national integration and nation-state formation. Analyzing the HEH experience, however, this article argues that EU institutions are severely constrained in their history politics by the growing political dissensus and the associated need to accommodate the cultural milieu and the preferences and practices of curators and historians. The HEH outcome in other words reflects the limited power of EU institutions to develop and disseminate cohesive narratives of the history of Europe and European integration, which could potentially contribute to the transnational

convergence of European remembrance strategies and collective memory and the strengthening of European political identity. In fact, 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 (Vovk van Gaal and Dupont, 2012, p. 47) to legitimize its museum as one that conforms to prevailing curatorial and historical standards.

### **Catholic Micro-network for a European Integration Museum**

Putting 'Europe' in a history museum is not an innocent practice. The museum as a medium for forming and disseminating narratives about individual and collective experience constitutes an 'identity factory' (Korff and Roth, 1990). Increasingly, museums see their role as mediators in societal and political debates. It sometimes even appears that museums are given 'a responsibility to fix the situation' (Conn, 2010, p. 9). Historically, they were created to invent, strengthen and celebrate national master-narratives (Anderson, 1983). Many museums have critically re-evaluated the underlying nationalist projects and are continuing to do so (Porciani, 2012). They seek to transnationalize their narratives in the light of the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of societies, ongoing processes of Europeanisation and globalisation, and the growth of city tourism with the resulting increase in foreign visitors.

However, history museums do not incorporate organized forms of 'Europe', and of European integration in the present-day EU, in a meaningful way as part of the transnational revision of their narratives (Kaiser *et al.*, 2014). The European Commission noticed this absence of 'Europe' and European integration from national museums as early as 1977. At that time, the Commission started to advocate a stronger role of the European Communities in preserving and propagating European cultural heritage (Calligaro, 2013, pp. 79–116; Littoz-Monnet, 2007). It recommended, among other measures, that national museums should

dedicate one room to ‘Europe’, but nothing came of it. Then, in the 1990s, several bottom-up societal initiatives advocated the creation of a museum specifically dedicated to the history of Europe and European integration. However, the EP eventually informed the Musée de l’Europe, a Belgian project propagated by the exhibition company Tempora, that it would use the premises provisionally foreseen for this museum for its new Visitor Centre.

The following origins of the HEH provide an excellent example of how an effective micro-network can link politics, academia and culture to initiate a major European cultural project. The Musée de l’Europe project had provided a stimulus for the idea for such a museum. Its temporary exhibition ‘C’est notre histoire!’ shown in Brussels in 2007–2008 presented a strongly affirmative and teleological narrative of Western European integration after 1945 (Mazé, 2009). But the Belgian project lacked institutional support (Mazé, 2014). Eventually, Pöttering took up the suggestion by Ludger Kühnhardt, one of three directors of the Center for European Integration Studies at the University of Bonn, that the EP should take over and create such a museum. They worked closely with Hans Walter Hütter, director of the House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany, also in Bonn, who became the chairman of the HEH’s Committee of Experts and continued as an ordinary member of the Academic Committee.

Pöttering, a Catholic member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) from the Emsland region was first elected to the EP in 1979. From 1999 to 2007 he chaired the parliamentary party of the European People’s Party (EPP) before becoming EP president in 2007. Pöttering had known Kühnhardt, who is also a Catholic CDU member, since 1983, co-authoring several books with him. In some of his own publications Kühnhardt advocated the creation of a European history museum in Brussels (see Kühnhardt, 2005, p. 137). It was only Pöttering’s election to the EP presidency, however, which allowed both men to launch the proposal in a suitable institutional framework. In March and September 2007 Kühnhardt

drafted two papers on the topic for use by Pöttering (Interview Kühnhardt; Kühnhardt, 2007). He did not become a member of the Committee of Experts, but arranged a visit to the House of History in Bonn for members of the EP Bureau. The Bonn museum director Hütter used this opportunity to argue for his museum, and its combination of a chronological and thematic narrative, as a model for the future museum focused on the history of Europe and European integration. Hütter, who is also a Catholic CDU member, had been active in local party politics in Mönchengladbach until he was appointed director of the Bonn museum.

The core of the micro-network behind the HEH project therefore consisted of only three individuals – all of them Catholic members of the CDU from the western borderlands of Germany. Their preferences for European integration were largely shaped by the Christian democratic federalist tradition and the policy of Western integration pursued by the Catholic German chancellors Adenauer and Kohl (Kaiser, 2007). As a consequence they were keen to use the future museum for strengthening the EU's cultural integration and political legitimacy. Pöttering was quite explicit about this overriding objective. At the inaugural meeting of the Committee of Experts on 3 March 2008 he stated that the 'political discourse of the day [lacks] an historical view, which might help to foster such a sense [of identity]'. His hope was that the HEH could 'give a fresh boost to a spiritual dimension for the EU, focusing heavily on the European integration process'. He added that the HEH should place particular emphasis 'on the values underpinning integration'.<sup>1</sup> According to Kühnhardt (Interview) this particular focus on values reflected a strategic choice to generate broad EP support for the project.

Highly experienced in the institutional politics of the EP, Pöttering quickly established two crucial trajectories for securing political support for his proposal. One concerned the

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<sup>1</sup> Committee of Experts, House of European History, Minutes of the constituent meeting of 3 March 2008, PV/714473EN.doc.

management of the EP's internal processes. Pöttering liaised closely with the Dane Harald Rømer, Secretary General of the EP from 2007 to 2009. When he retired from the EP in 2009, Rømer became co-ordinator of the internal EP working group on the HEH project. He co-operated closely with Klaus Welle, his successor as EP Secretary General, who had previously been Secretary General of the EPP and its parliamentary party before acting as Head of Pöttering's cabinet during his EP presidency. Welle was ideally placed to 'keep the ball low' (Interview Kühnhardt) and the project as much as possible out of partisan conflict in the EP.

The second trajectory concerned the need to secure support from the socialists following the EP's dominant pattern of informal grand coalition politics (Hix *et al.*, 2003), which have been reinforced recently by the rise of eurosceptic parties. Here, Pöttering drew on his close contacts with EP Vice-President Miguel Angel Martínez. The Spanish socialist became the EP's special mediator for the co-ordination of the HEH project and regularly attended meetings of the Committee of Experts and the later Academic Committee and Board of Trustees. Martínez had been President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe from 1992 to 1996. In this capacity he had participated in the award of its annual Museum Prize to the House of History in Bonn in 1995.<sup>2</sup> Together Pöttering and Martínez generated support for the HEH project and recruited, among others, the former Belgian Commissioner Etienne Davignon and the former Irish Commissioner and World Trade Organisation director Peter Sutherland for the Board of Trustees. To secure the broadest possible cross-party support and appease Eastern European critics they even included the Polish MEP Wojciech Roszkowski, a member of the nationalist Party of Law and Justice, which is allied to eurosceptic parties in the EP and in power in Poland since 2015.

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<sup>2</sup> E-mail from Alfonso Guerra Reina, [office of Miguel Angel Martínez] to author, 9 December 2010.

Roszkowski ‘luckily lacked interest and engagement’ however,<sup>3</sup> and did not try to disrupt the project in the EP.

Pöttering was keen to use the concept paper to be prepared by the Committee of Experts for shoring up support for his project in the EP. He focused his attention entirely on managing the EP process. In contrast, the Committee of Experts discussed in depth the desirable process for setting up the museum and developing the permanent exhibition. Against the background of their own controversial discussions about appropriate narratives of the history of Europe and European integration, the committee members stated clearly that their report should form ‘the starting point, and not the conclusion, of a comprehensive public debate, and that this should take place not only in the parliamentary bodies, with MEPs and in administrative circles, but should also involve academics and museum specialists and the general public.’<sup>4</sup> Their plea for such a public debate was strongly informed by the German experience of the House of History in Bonn. When Chancellor Kohl first proposed the idea upon taking power in 1982, it was sharply criticized as a propaganda tool for the ‘spiritual and moral renewal’ that he proclaimed. Subsequently, however, Heiner Geißler, the more centrist and intellectual CDU Secretary General succeeded in removing the project from partisan conflict by facilitating a broad cross-party and public debate about its objectives and appropriate narrative.

### ***Longue Durée* Narrative with a Focus on Post-war European Integration**

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<sup>3</sup> E-mail from Tobias Winkler [office of Hans-Gert Pöttering] to author, 15 November 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Committee of Experts, House of European History, Minutes of the meeting on 16 July 2008, PV/736156EN.doc.

When they started work, the Committee of Experts had a natural reference point for their proposal for the future museum's narrative in 'C'est notre histoire!' (Tempora, 2007). Tempora staged this exhibition to propagate their museum project and showcase how its section on post-war European integration might look. As a result of this focus on the time after 1945, this temporary exhibition lacked the long-term perspective since the high middle ages which characterized the larger project for a Musée de l'Europe. Moreover, the exhibition largely failed to contextualize post-war 'core Europe' integration in the present-day EU within the Cold War and decolonisation. Its narrative method drew on the combined strategies of personalisation and personification (Kaiser, 2011). The first room sought to personalize the origins of 'core Europe'. It told the story of eight so-called founding fathers of European integration. Throughout the rest of the exhibition, however, the organizers complemented this form of personalisation with the personification of European integration reflecting a broader shift in history museums towards telling stories of acting or suffering, but of unknown individuals (Thiemeyer, 2010, p. 146). Here, the exhibition told stories about 27 individual citizens, one from each EU Member State at the time – stories that were all related in one way or another to these individuals' own experience of, or contribution to, integration in a larger societal as well as political sense. Such personification can introduce an emotional touch into the museum, which has the potential to attract visitors who can identify with these ordinary citizens.

The members of the HEH Committee of Experts visited 'C'est notre histoire!' and discussed its merits at their meeting on 15 April 2008. They commended some of the strategies and modes of representation. They also criticized what they saw as the teleological character of interpreting post-war European integration in 'crude black-and-white terms'. In particular, the committee members highlighted that the exhibition was characterized by an 'excessive concentration on revolutionary aspects' of post-war 'core Europe' integration at

the expense of longer-term continuities in fields like culture and social life. Visitors got the impression that ‘Europe had simply emerged quite spontaneously, preceded by nothing’. Moreover, the exhibition focused above all on what might appear with hindsight as the ‘victors of history’, namely those who supported ‘core Europe’ integration from the start. The highly contested nature of European integration, euroscepticism and countries like Sweden, Finland and Austria, which did not join the EU until 1995, did not feature at all.<sup>5</sup>

The committee members agreed on a number of key points of the museum’s future narrative which they summarized in their final report (Committee of Experts, 2008; Mazé, 2009; Settele, 2015; Siepmann, 2012). First of all, they rejected the idea reiterated in a letter to Hütter by committee member Giorgio Cracco, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Turin, to include one room per EU Member State to present its national history. All other committee members believed instead that the HEH ‘cannot be a summation of regional and national histories, but must draw attention to the main points and themes of European history’.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, unlike the Musée de l’Europe project, which proposed to start its narrative in the high middle ages, the committee agreed on a longer-term perspective on European history beginning with Greek and Roman history, not the origins or spread of Christianity. Thus, Matti Klinge, Professor Emeritus of Nordic History at the University of Helsinki, suggested starting ‘with Homer and Greek tradition, 2,500 years’. Similarly, António Reis, Professor of History at the New University of Lisbon, insisted that it was necessary to explain the long history of European values by reaching back to Greek philosophy and Roman law.

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<sup>5</sup> Committee of Experts, House of European History, Minutes of the meeting of 15 April 2008, PV/720153EN.doc.

<sup>6</sup> Committee of Experts, House of European History, Minutes of the meeting on 16 July 2008, PV/736156EN.doc.

Mária Schmidt, director of the House of Terror museum in Budapest, added from a more practical curatorial perspective that without such contextualisation, ‘young people could not be taught anything about historical events’.<sup>7</sup> Compared to the Christian-Catholic perspective of the Musée de l’Europe, therefore, the Committee of Experts advocated a secular narrative of European values (Huistra *et al.*, 2014, p. 132) – something in line with the more left-liberal and Republican notion of ‘constitutional patriotism’ (Sternberger, 1990) borrowed from the discourse about the (West) German political system and identity since the 1960s.

The Musée de l’Europe, thirdly, had a clear notion of historical evolution. According to its narrative plan (Tempora, 2003), Europe has alternated between phases of unity and of conflict during the last 1,000 years. Instead, the Committee of Experts in the end advocated devoting 60 to 70 per cent of the permanent exhibition to the section entitled ‘Europe in the Twentieth Century’, which would start with the end of World War I. The two sections on Europe’s origins or heritage and ‘Europe in Turmoil’ would each occupy 15 per cent of the available floor space. These sections would treat themes to prepare the visitor for the experience of the 20th century. The committee simply collected ideas for themes such as ‘prosperity’, ‘reason’ and so on, which ran to 28 points at the end of the committee meeting on 15 April 2008.

The Committee of Experts, fourthly, shifted the focus somewhat away from European history after 1945 to strengthen long-term perspectives on European history and values. Their initial idea was to devote 30 per cent of the floor space to Europe up to 1945, and 70 per cent to post-World War II Europe. During the course of its deliberations, the committee changed this to 30–40 per cent and 60–70 per cent. Moreover, it redefined the main section as covering

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<sup>7</sup> Committee of Experts, House of European History, Minutes of the constituent meeting of 3 March 2008, PV/714473EN.doc.

the entire period since the end of World War I, not World War II, which in turn necessitated its renaming from the original title 'Building Europe'.

Despite the reduced space for Europe since 1945, in the end this section retained a strong focus on the history of European integration as originally proposed by Pöttering and his micro-network. The history of European integration 'could be related at several levels', Włodzimierz Borodziej, Professor of Modern History at the University of Warsaw suggested, but it was primarily 'a history of events'. Michel Dumoulin, Professor of Modern History at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, insisted on making a distinction between a 'dreamed-of Europe', predating the start of an institutionalized process, and a 'Europe in action' after 1945. Still, even Dumoulin, an expert in European integration history, did not advance a clearer notion of European integration and how to represent it in a museum – a lack of clarity about its nature and innovative forms of narrating its history beyond negotiations and treaties by men in grey suits which had repercussions for the theme's subsequent relative neglect by the team of curators appointed during 2010–11.

### **Curators and Historians Co-operating on a European History Museum**

As it turned out, the work of the Committee of Experts did not create significant path-dependencies for the planning of the museum's actual permanent exhibition to be housed in the Eastman Building in Brussels. The final version of the report (Committee of Experts, 2008) played down key decisions such as the structuring into three sections. Instead the report read more like a chronological enumeration of themes from the history of Europe which deserve to be treated in the future museum. Conscious as museum director of the practical implications and limitations of creating a permanent exhibition, Hütter did not want to constrain the future team of curators too much. Subsequently, however, three main factors

changed the final narrative outcome in a major way compared to Pöttering's proposal and the Committee of Experts' preferences. First, the politicians and key administrative staff focused entirely on securing EP support for the project, not the permanent exhibition's changing concept and content. Second, the aggregate preferences of the newly appointed team of curators diverged substantially from the original proposal for a museum of European and European integration history. Finally, the newly constituted Academic Committee with its different composition compared to the earlier Expert Committee, colluded with leading staff in the team of curators in strongly downplaying the role of (Western) European integration in the permanent exhibition.

At the political level, Pöttering, who remained MEP until 2014, sought to ensure a smooth transition to his successor as EP president, the Pole Jerzy Buzek, also from the EPP. More importantly, together with Martínez he maintained grand coalition support for his project when the German social democrat Martin Schulz became EP president in 2012. At a meeting with the team of curators in December 2012, Schulz assured them of his backing on condition that they eschew a Christian democratic-dominated teleological 'core Europe' narrative in favour of a scientifically sound broader approach to contextualising European integration, which they preferred anyhow. Discussions in the parliamentary parties and EP committees showed much broader support for the project extending beyond the EPP and the socialists. Despite some criticism in the Greens–European Free Alliance parliamentary party targeted at the project's EPP origins and cost, for example, the group's co-leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit spoke strongly in favour of a 'museal space' for 'European memory cultures' (Interview Trüpel). Ultimately, sharp political criticism of the HEH largely remained limited to MEPs from the Polish Party of Law and Justice and the eurosceptic UK Independence Party in Britain, where the Committee of Experts' report had already been received with disdain by eurosceptic newspapers (*Daily Mail*, 2011).

Moreover, the politicians and key administrators did not want to be seen as interfering with the professional competence and judgements of the newly appointed team of curators. They were keen to minimize any potential criticism of the possibly partisan or federalist character of the museum's narrative. To facilitate co-operation between the team of curators and the EP administration, Constanze Itzel became a team member. With a doctorate in art history and curatorial experience, Itzel was ideally placed to mediate between the academic and museum milieu and the political and administrative milieu.

At the end of 2010, the EP appointed Taja Vovk van Gaal as leader of the team of curators. Three motives influenced her appointment. Vovk van Gaal had been director of the Ljubljana City Museum for many years, which she modernized in line with Western museum standards. Moreover, she appeared professionally reliable due to her Western European work experience at the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam. Finally, the decision to appoint her at least in part stemmed from the underrepresentation of Eastern European perspectives on the Committee of Experts and the criticism from Polish commentators in particular of its report's allegedly heavily Western European bias (Sauerland, 2008; Trüpel, 2009, p. 187). More generally, MEPs from the new Eastern European EU Member States had actively lobbied for many years as part of the broader 'fight over European remembrance' (Leggewie, 2011) for changing the EP's own remembrance culture. They were keen to include the experience of Stalinism on a par with National Socialism as two totalitarian systems and sides of the same coin, and to insert Eastern European suffering under Stalinism and communism more effectively into pan-European discourses (Neumayer, 2015; Troebst, 2013) – demands that Vovk van Gaal supported and which effectively downgraded the prevalent German and Western European discourse about the singularity of the Shoah.

In contrast, Vovk van Gaal had practically no knowledge of, or interest in the experience of Western European integration after 1945, which was after all supposed to be the

museum's core focus. When she presented her initial ideas to the team of curators she heavily emphasized the Stalinist experience in Eastern Europe and the everyday lives of Europeans (Interview Itzel). Her primary interest in the history of everyday life as connecting Eastern and Western Europe to some extent was shared by Elke Pluymen, a museologist from The Hague, with whom Vovk van Gaal worked closely in the beginning. Moreover, Andrea Mork, who joined the team from the House of History in Bonn and as Concept Manager became responsible for the exhibition's overall integration, was a specialist of Nazi Germany and inter-war Europe. She, too, had limited knowledge of, or interest in European integration. In fact, when she moved to Brussels the House of History in Bonn was undergoing the first major revision of its permanent exhibition which resulted in the removal of its section on the Treaties of Rome and the downgrading of European integration in favour of the inclusion of the East German experience during the Cold War. Two team members were appointed to lead on the history of European integration, however. They were Etienne Deschamps and Martí Grau I Segú, who had worked in the EP as parliamentary assistant before briefly becoming an alternate socialist MEP during 2008–09. Deschamps was the only member of the larger team of curators with more in-depth knowledge of the history of European integration and academic debates about it.

The shift towards strengthening Eastern European perspectives was reciprocated in the newly appointed Academic Committee. Coinciding with Buzek's EP presidency, Borodziej, who is close to Buzek's centrist Citizens Platform and the EPP, assumed its presidency, with Hütter becoming an ordinary member. With his strong connections to German academic institutions and historians, for which he has recently been attacked in the intra-Polish fight over historical memory, Borodziej seemed a safe pair of hands. At the same time, his appointment strengthened Eastern European perspectives on post-war history, as did the co-

optation of two other individuals on the Academic Committee: Norman Davies, a British historian of Poland, and Oliver Rathkolb from the University of Vienna.

At the same time, Dumoulin as the only expert of European integration history on the Committee of Experts no longer contributed to the academic advisory work. He believed that the process was not academically sound enough and could potentially lead to a teleological narrative (Interview Dumoulin). Moreover, Isabelle Benoit, who had masterminded the temporary exhibition ‘C’est notre histoire!’ was invited, but withdrew from the Academic Committee after a few months in October 2009 in the vain hope that this would allow the exhibition company Tempora to play a role in implementing the HEH plan.<sup>8</sup> As a result of these changes the Academic Committee did not have a single member with specialist academic expertise in what was originally intended to be the museum’s main focus. Its composition had been entirely determined by issues of regional and grand coalition balance. To give but one example, the appointment of the social democrat Austrian historian Rathkolb as a counterweight to the nationalist conservative Hungarian Schmidt followed informal advice given to Pöttering by the former Austrian Vice-Chancellor Erhard Busek from the EPP-allied Austrian People’s Party.<sup>9</sup>

As it turned out, the newly appointed team of curators and the Academic Committee had different preferences for the process of devising the permanent exhibition from those of the Committee of Experts and their plea for an open and transparent public debate. The eurosceptic political and media reaction to the Committee of Experts’ report in 2008 only served to reinforce their attitude. Pöttering (Interview) deliberately limited publicity to avoid controversy and safeguard the EP’s internal decision-making process. The information about the project that Pöttering disseminated at a press conference in January 2012 was minimal. As

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<sup>8</sup> E-mail from Isabelle Benoit to author, 17 December 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Private communication Erhard Busek to author.

if historicism and positivism had never been challenged, he claimed that the HEH would give an ‘objective portrayal of history’ (Sels, 2012). At one point in 2012, the team of curators and the EP administration discussed the option of a larger public symposium to discuss the preliminary plan for the permanent exhibition to seek more external input. However, EP Secretary-General Welle shelved the idea in September 2012. The EP president’s cabinet, the Board of Trustees, and the Academic Committee all agreed to avoid such publicity and ‘let the team work quietly’ (Interview Rathkolb). Vovk van Gaal occasionally spoke about the HEH in more academic settings and otherwise controlled the team’s external contacts tightly for a long time. In short, the EP and the team of curators were largely successful at keeping the HEH under the radar of the European media and eurosceptic political groups.

### **European Integration Lost in Narrative Translation**

The changing actor constellation and the deliberate strategy to avoid a broader public debate about the museum during the second phase strongly impacted on the permanent exhibition’s planned narrative. This narrative focuses on the 20th century and only covers the 19th century as explanatory context. Thus it largely lacks the consistent *longue durée* perspective advocated by the Committee of Experts. Compared to the 2008 report the HEH strengthens Eastern European perspectives considerably. It also prioritizes the history of Europe since 1945. However, it treats European integration largely as a history of major events such as treaty negotiations and EU enlargements. Integration history thus provides the chronological scaffolding of the rest of the permanent exhibition that zooms in on themes as diverse as the Cold War and women’s emancipation. When co-operation in the team of curators became protracted due to their conflicting views and they ran out of time, Vovk van Gaal and Mork allocated thematic and spatial responsibilities to individual curators to accelerate planning.

Their procedural decision however accentuated the ghettoization of the history of European integration, which is not integrated organically with other sections to illustrate its wider political, economic and social impact.

To some extent the HEH's permanent exhibition has been shaped by the choice of the Eastman Building and its renovation. Its seven levels have invited a chronological spatial division as recommended by the Academic Committee,<sup>10</sup> from (after two entrance levels) levels 2 to 6, the top floor atrium, where the exhibition ends with a section entitled 'Looking Ahead' (European Parliament, 2014). While such a division could invite a teleological narrative about Europe's upwards evolution through different stages, as in the Musée de l'Europe's idea of phases of unity and conflict, the HEH uses level 2 for a basic introduction to some themes of European history and the structure of the exhibition, before proceeding on level 3 to discuss Europe's history from the 19th century to 1945. Level 4 is devoted to Europe until 1973 and level 5 to Europe's development since then.

Starting the chronological narrative with the 19th century on level 3 reflects the influence of more left-wing historiographical paradigms and curatorial perspectives about the great importance of industrialization, urbanization, and colonial expansion for understanding increased class conflict and extreme nationalism as key factors contributing to the rise of dictatorial regimes and the self-destruction of Europe in two World Wars. Hence, when meeting the team of curators in December 2012, the German social democrat EP President Schulz complimented them on having the British historians 'Judt and Hobshawm on their mind' in their conceptualization of European history. While the permanent exhibition introduces themes such as the Reformation and the Enlightenment on level 2, it does not make the European experience until the French Revolution and industrialization central to the narrative. Themes such as the legacy of Greek philosophy, Christian 'unity' in Medieval

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<sup>10</sup> Academic Committee, Summary, Draft, Meeting of 12 October 2011, PE479.740/BUR/GT.

Europe or the Reformation would be central to a variety of more culturalist, and potentially essentialist, narratives of European history. Hence, by de-emphasizing cultural and religious aspects, the HEH refrains from engaging in a potentially highly divisive discussion of what might have made Europe specific or even, in more normative terms, special. Thus, the HEH narrative is broadly aligned with secular and ethnically and culturally inclusive contemporary preferences for constitutional patriotism.

The HEH has also strengthened Eastern European perspectives on European history. Vovk van Gaal's original preference for almost writing Western European integration out of the museum narrative provoked heated discussions in the team of curators and proved politically unacceptable to the EP. Her plea and that of others on her team and the Academic Committee and more generally in Eastern Europe (Mälksoo, 2014), for discussing Stalinism and the fate of Europeans behind the 'Iron Curtain' on a par with National Socialism and the Western European experience is largely reflected in the HEH narrative, however. The permanent exhibition systematically compares the Nazi and Stalinist regimes on level 4, which responds to a key demand in Eastern European history politics and conforms to the EP's more recent remembrance practice. It also treats the Holocaust far less prominently than might have been expected in a more traditional Western European setting. Thus, the Academic Committee recommended at an early stage in its deliberations that an 'exhibition with the Shoah and the World Wars at its centre' was 'not being made for the future'.<sup>11</sup> They also opposed the idea of a separate room or space devoted specifically to the annihilation of European Jews. Instead, the HEH weaves the Holocaust experience into the three sections about the Nazi regime, World War II, and how it has been remembered.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Academic Committee, Summary, Draft, Meeting of 12 October 2011, PE479/740/BUR/GT.

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Mork, Presentation Academic Committee, 28 January 2014.

In the end, however, the HEH narrative represents a compromise, just as recent EP resolutions on European history have sought to amalgamate Western and Eastern European experiences and preferences. Crucially, it does not cross two red lines of dominant Western European historiography and memory discourses, which – in the perspective of Mária Schmidt – marked the ‘framework of censorship’ in the Academic Committee (Interview Schmidt). While adopting the totalitarianism paradigm for the ‘highly sensitive’ comparison of two political systems, the exhibition highlights that the Nazi and Stalinist regimes were nevertheless ‘not equal’ and ‘very different in their ideological roots and goals’.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the exhibition points out that ‘the industrialized genocide on European Jews organized by the Nazis with bureaucratic precision was without precedence in world history’. It thus defends the idea of its singularity (Littoz-Monnet, 2013), although it does so only in terms of the mass murder’s industrial organization.<sup>14</sup>

The HEH, finally, tells the story of European integration in ‘15 milestones from the Congress of Europe [in 1948] to the discussion about a constitution since 2000’, as a ‘story of ambitions and setbacks’ (Interview Grau I Segú). It has adopted an ‘atomic model’ for its approach. The milestones are arranged at the heart of levels 3 and 4, around the central staircase, surrounded by thematic sections. The seven ‘milestones’ on level 3 focus on themes such as the formation of the ECSC and the Treaties of Rome that created the European Economic Community, for example. This level also has a gallery with the ‘founding fathers’ as ‘visionary statesmen’. However, ‘far from promoting a personality cult, this gallery should give an insight into the lives and political thinking of men who built the foundation of the

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<sup>13</sup> Andrea Mork, Presentation Academic Committee, 28 January 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Andrea Mork, Presentation Academic Committee, 28 January 2014.

integration process'. The curators assured the Academic Committee that the HEH would present these 'founding fathers' in an 'unheroic manner'.<sup>15</sup>

The permanent exhibition therefore retains a focus on European integration. Ironically, however, the theme features far less prominently in the EP-organized HEH than in the Musée de l'Europe plan or, for that matter, in the Committee of Expert's 2008 report. It draws on personalization to some extent, but eschews the representational strategy of personification that played a central role in the temporary exhibition 'C'est notre histoire!' Moreover, the theme was clearly delimited in the team of curators' organization and working patterns so that it has not become mainstreamed into the representation of the history of Europe since 1945. Its relative marginality can be explained by a combination of three factors: the lack of knowledge of European integration and the more recent historiography on the part of the vast majority of curators and the Academic Committee, which has no historian with relevant specialist expertise on it; the push by some curators and the Academic Committee for the greater prominence of Eastern European perspectives, which are naturally absent from the Western European integration narrative until the end of the Cold War (Interview Schmidt); and finally, the strong belief among many curators and members of the Academic Committee (e.g. Interview Rathkolb) that the history of European integration as (apparently only) one of treaties and negotiations is boring and cannot be told for visitors in an animated and engaging manner to guarantee the HEH's popularity with visitors.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>15</sup> Presentation on European Integration and Founding Fathers, Academic Committee, 28 January 2014.

This article has traced the process of the HEH's formation as a major cultural initiative and project from its origins through to the finalization of its permanent exhibition in advance of its projected opening in the Spring of 2017. It has analyzed the changing constellation of actors and networks who have sought to influence this process, and their preferred narratives of the history of Europe and European integration.

Since Pöttering's original proposal, the EP has managed the project according to its own institutional logic. Pöttering himself successfully embedded his idea in the EP's broader grand coalition politics. Placing the project planning in the hands of DG Communication indicated moreover that Pöttering, Rømer and Welle primarily saw the HEH as a means of disseminating information to EU citizens and offering them added value on their trips to EU institutions in Brussels, not as a particularly innovative cultural project. They had no strong interest in the museum's actual content and narrative, only in its institutional success and actual opening. Hence, sporadic attempts to mobilize Rømer to make the EU more central to the museum and its narrative failed.

The nomination of the Academic Committee and the team of curators followed the prevalent EU logic of regional and political proportionality, irrespective of the prospective members' historiographical or curatorial preferences. Responding to the political noise created by MEPs and other individuals and organized groups from new Eastern European Member States, the positions of chairman of the Academic Committee and of leader of the team of curators were filled with a Polish professor and a Slovene curator. In terms of their research focus and preferences for the museum, even Academic Committee members like the British Norman Davies and the Austrian Oliver Rathkolb supported the East Europeanization of the narrative proposed in the Committee of Experts' 2008 report. The Academic Committee was also balanced in terms of its members' affiliation with socialist or centre-right EPP parties. Strikingly, as a result of this recruitment process, the team of curators had only

one member with deeper knowledge of European integration and its associated historiography, and the Academic Committee none. Instead, several of its members were positively hostile to narrating the experience of European integration in any detail in the HEH, and absolutely averse to its personalization as a representational strategy.

Thus, the EP's own institutional logic (alongside curatorial and design motives) quite fundamentally transformed the HEH's narrative focus. The HEH eschews a long-term cultural historical perspective on the present-day Europe and the EU as propagated by the Musée de l'Europe. Instead, it essentially locates the origins of Europe's 20th century experience in the 19th century. Moreover, it advances the East Europeanization of the EP's history politics and preferred historical narrative up to a point without however crossing two red lines of prevalent Western European historiography and memory discourse: the difference between the Nazi and Stalinist political ideologies and the singularity of the Holocaust, at least in terms of its industrial organization and scale of the mass murder. Finally, the HEH fails to put European integration at the centre of its narrative. It avoids a teleological narrative of progress through 'ever closer union', something that will strengthen its legitimacy among professional curators and historians. Paradoxically, as a result these groups may be more satisfied with the outcome than those like Pöttering who originally proposed the project. At the same time, the need to say something about European integration within a very limited space nevertheless has led to an antiquated focus on negotiations and treaties as 'milestones' combined with a mild form of personalization with the 'founding fathers' storyline. As a result, the HEH largely fails to show the impact of the present-day EU, let alone other forms of transnational voluntary and international organization, on the political, economic and social development of Europe and on the everyday lives of European citizens.

This narrative outcome is a compromise after long negotiations among a variety of actors. It does not constitute a new EU-centred consensus on European memory. It is

remarkable, however, how much advocates of a greater presence of Eastern European memory cultures succeeded in hijacking these negotiations and focusing them on narrowing down the gap between prevalent Western and Eastern European memory cultures – this at the expense of other forms of spatial fragmentation such as between the experiences of Northern European democratic welfare states and Southern European dictatorships and economic backwardness; or more generally, between the ‘core’ and various peripheries in Europe and the EU. Thus, the experience of the HEH raises the larger question, which is beyond the scope of this article, to what extent the history politics and remembrance policies of EU institutions more generally have become East Europeanized. Clearly, ‘core Europe’ states and networks still dominate much of the politics and policy-making in the EU even after its several enlargements. It may well be, however, that their governments and elites see cultural policy and history politics as a weak field of little material significance – and in this sense as a suitable playground for Eastern European history politics activism that could help deflect criticism on the EU’s periphery of its prevailing informal power relations.

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