



The House of European History. Report on the Permanent Exhibition



30 October 2017

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By the Platform of European Memory and Conscience,

Prepared by Paweł Ukielski Ph.D. (Editor) with Monika Kareniauskaite, Ph.D. and Yana Hrynko (Co-editors)

This report was prepared as a result of a study visit of representatives of different institutions, members of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, to the House of European History (HEH) in Brussels on 10th August 2017. The participants are experienced experts in fields of commemoration, remembrance, history as well as creating narrative, historical exhibitions. The Platform's request to the HEH to receive the full narrative line of the exhibition (the set of all texts presented in the exhibition) remained unanswered. The following report has been compiled based on evaluation forms filled in by the participants.

Participants of the study trip:

- **Göran Lindblad** (Sweden, President, Platform of European Memory and Conscience)
- **Neela Winkelmann** (Czech Republic, Managing Director, Platform of European Memory and Conscience)
- **Toomas Hiio** (Estonia, Member of the Executive Board, Platform of European Memory and Conscience; Chairman of the Board, Estonian Institute of Historical Memory)
- **Siegfried Reiprich** (Germany, Member of the Executive Board, Platform of European Memory and Conscience; Director, Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten zur Erinnerung an die Opfer politischer Gewaltherrschaft)
- **Paweł Ukielski** (Poland, Member of the Executive Board, Platform of European Memory and Conscience; Deputy Director, Warsaw Rising Museum)
- **Igor Bigun** (Ukraine, Centre for Research on the Liberation Movement)
- **Igor Cașu** (Moldova, Director, Center for the Study of Totalitarianism)
- **Inese Dreimane** (Latvia, Museum of the Occupation of Latvia)
- **Christian Fuchs**, (Germany, Board Commissioner, Union of Victims of Communist Tyranny UOKG; President, International Union of Political Prisoners Inter-Asso)
- **Yana Hrynko** (Ukraine, National Museum „Holodomor Victims Memorial”)
- **Monika Kareniauskaite** (Lithuania, Chief Research and Communications Officer, The Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania)
- **Robert Kostro** (Poland, Director, Polish History Museum)
- **Cecylia Kuta** (Poland, Institute of National Remembrance)
- **Alžběta Majerová** (Czech Republic, Platform of European Memory and Conscience)
- **Gunārs Nāgels** (Latvia, Director, Museum of the Occupation of Latvia)
- **Anna Piekarska** (Poland, Deputy Director, Polish History Museum)
- **Peter Rendek** (Czech Republic, Director, Centre for Documentation of Totalitarian Regimes)
- **Julia Spohr** (Germany, Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten zur Erinnerung an die Opfer politischer Gewaltherrschaft)
- **Maciej Zakrzewski** (Poland, Institute of National Remembrance)

Museum exhibitions are powerful tools to shape the remembrance of people. The narrative line, proportions, presented facts, language used and even the scenography of the display – all those factors influence the visitors' imagination of the presented past. Every exhibition, due to its nature, is a huge synthesis of history, where all the abovementioned factors play a vital role. Therefore it is not enough to judge an exhibition only on the level of details (if the facts presented are right or not), but also on many different levels, with a kind of „meta-level“ of the general message delivered to the auditorium, the way it interprets history. Every exhibition leaves also impressions, feelings or interpretations, which stay with the visitors long after the tour. All those must be evaluated in order to deliver a complex judgement of the presentation's value.

1. The overall message

In the House of European History, one could have expected to find an exhibition that would build (or refer to) a common European identity and a pride in European values which stand behind the history of Europe and the European integration. As it is defined on the website: „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 thus becomes a meeting point for people of all generations and walks of life.“

However, this statement is unfortunately far from the truth. The House of European History's message is everything but diverse. 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.

What is at least as important is that European values, such as democracy, freedom, rule of law or human rights, are not stressed sufficiently enough to become a message of the exhibition. Even the greatest successes and victories of those values, such as the defeat of the totalitarian evil in the Cold War, are not presented in a proper way – this message is completely blurred, and the year 1989 is not treated as a victory, but as something that „just happened“.

All further mistakes, omissions, misinterpretations or even distortions of facts have their roots in the abovementioned basic ideological assumption.

2. The narrative line

The most important consequences of the ideological message for the narrative line of the exhibition are as follows:

- 2.1. The decision to present the French Revolution as „the beginning of the story“ instead of the more obvious Charlemagne seems to express the Marxist ideological lens to interpret European history as a string of revolutions culminating in a classless

Communist society based on the ideology of Marx, Engels and Bakunin (the visitor does not learn why him?), which is presented as the best and most progressive thought originating from 19th century Europe. European history did not begin in 1789. There were the Charlemagne's empire, the Holy Roman Empire, Venice, Rzeczpospolita, Reformation, Turkish Wars, the 30-year War and the Peace of Westphalia and many other important events that were instrumental in the creation of modern Europe. The Middle Ages, Renaissance or Baroque epochs are also still shaping our identity.

2.2. Regarding the selection of ideas to present „the roots” – entitled „Memory and European Heritage” (in this ideological concept, roots are all ideas that preceded the French Revolution):

2.2.1. Point „Marxism, socialism, Communism” – the section „Roots” describes history (in a very, very small dosage) before the French Revolution. A complete falsification of history is the statement that countries of the Eastern bloc „decided to have Communism” after WWII. The last sentence asking a question if Communism still has a future is outrageous for the people who were killed, tortured, died and suffered under Communist dictatorships;

2.2.2. Lack of liberalism – it is even more odd that the idea that shaped capitalism of 19th century, and still is very influential (and emerged prior to the French Revolution) is absent in this part of exhibition. While Karl Marx appears in many places of the exhibition, we have no mention of Adam Smith or John Stuart Mill;

2.2.3. Lack of the concept of freedom as such, which is a basis of the entire European civilisation;

2.2.4. Lack of Roman law, as the constituting theory of law in the European civilisation;

2.2.5. Very negative attitude towards nations, which are presented as a basic reason for most of European sufferings – chauvinism, xenophobia, Fascism and Nazism. The positive side of nations is strongly downplayed. Controversial (or even false) theses are presented in that context (such as a conviction that nations emerged in the 19th century). This attitude goes completely opposite to the European Union's idea of the “unity in diversity” and lacks any reference to the idea of self-determination of nations. In the way presented in the exhibition it is rather a call for the creation of a *Homo Sovieticus* – people with no nationalities, a homogeneous mass of identical people;

2.2.6. Many nations existed in the Middle Ages as powerful kingdoms and their long history constitutes an important part of the historical identity of these nations (e.g. Hungary, Sweden or Spain). But the exhibition gives the impression that all of them emerged as late as in the 19th century.

2.2.7. Very negative attitude towards Christianity, which is not even presented as such but as an „omnipresence of Christianity” (which suggests it is something wrong) – the only such situation in that part of the exhibition. Ridiculous, offensive comment: "a religion that dominates the continent but fortunately is giving way";

2.2.8. Very poor and insufficient presentation of the phenomenon of philosophy, with an absurd presentation of two personalities only: Aristotle and Slovenian Marxist Slavoj Žižek.

- 2.2.9. The roots of Europe could be summarized by a famous proverb, saying: „What is Europe? It is philosophy from Greece, law from the Roman Empire and Golgotha!“ It was not mentioned.
- 2.3. Lack of presentation of the role of the different religions, their roles and mutual interplay through the ages (Judaism, Christianity and Islam in Europe).
- 2.4. Presentation of the civil war in Spain as a conflict between dictatorship and democracy. Presentation of the Republican side of the conflict as „democracy“ is far from truth.
- 2.5. Language used. The term „Stalinism“ as a description of one of two totalitarianisms, which is methodologically wrong – it was not „Stalinism“ which presented totalitarian ideology, in the same way as there was not any „Hitlerism“. There were „Nazism“ and „Communism“, which is also recognized in official European documents (e.g. Resolution 1481 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 25 January 2006 or European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism).
- 2.6. Quotes by Communist dictators such as Lenin in Stalin presented in fancy metallic lettering on the walls and in the showcases in the exhibition halls. This is offensive. It would be unthinkable to do likewise with quotes by Hitler or Goebbels.
- 2.7. In the narrative on WWII the role of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; Hitler and Stalin, Nazi Germany and Soviet Union as allies is poorly presented. The fact of totalitarian cooperation in 1939-1941 is missing.
- 2.8. The way of presentation of the story of the Cold War which is hard to understand – the visitor does not get either the information or even the feeling that it was a conflict between European values (freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights) with totalitarianism (violations of fundamental human rights). The Eastern and Western blocs are presented as two different, but equal political and ideological systems (or even two different versions of socialism).
- 2.9. The basic economic difference between two blocs is not presented. The inefficiency of state-owned, planned economy is not explained, the character of property ownership between both blocs (private vs. forcible state ownership) is not shown. Forced nationalisation of property is not explained.
- 2.10. Following the Cold War part, the year 1989 is presented in the same manner – with no explanation why Communism fell, why the nations of the Eastern bloc felt liberated and what was the meaning of the end of the Cold War for Europe. And, the most important – even the biggest victory of European values over totalitarianism after WWII is not used to build the common identity of values, as it is not presented as a victory.

Other fundamental limitations of the narrative line:

- 2.11. Given that the exhibition begins with the French revolution, it surprisingly omits the following Napoleonic wars which had an impact on Europe, as well as other wars in 19th century Europe.
- 2.12. Not enough attention is given to the Shoah, which is presented in a very limited way (e.g., there is more on remembrance on the Shoah and coming to terms with it than on the Shoah itself). Other genocides (for instance the Holodomor in Ukraine or the Sinti and Roma genocide) are completely absent.
- 2.13. Complete lack of reference to the educational, cultural and scientific history of Europe. European architecture (Romanesque, Gothic, Baroque, Renaissance, Classicism, Jugendstil....) or universities are also omitted. Europe contributed so many wonderful things to the heritage of mankind in the realms of knowledge, arts and sciences, architecture and engineering – music, literature, sculpture, fine arts, theatre, photography, cinema, as well as groundbreaking scientific discoveries and inventions in physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, medicine, technology, communication, etc.
- 2.14. Proportions among different topics do not correspond to their real meaning in history. Very short part concerning WWII, very limited space devoted to the roots of Europe etc.
- 2.15. Lack of data. Numbers, maps, facts always give better understanding and build the context. Very often theses presented in the exhibition are not supported by numbers or facts.
- 2.16. Poor representation of the smaller European nations, their experience, achievements and impact on the development of Europe (usually of the Eastern side of it, but not only, because such countries as e.g. Switzerland, Finland or Denmark are also marginalized).

3. Detailed evaluation of individual sections

In this part we present our evaluation of different parts of the exhibition which were not presented in the general evaluation of the narrative line. We are aware that a museum exhibition is a great synthesis, which does not permit the presentation of all the facts and issues; it is not an encyclopaedia. During any discussion, the main stress should be put on the overall message and the general narrative line. However, in our opinion the extent of omissions and gaps in the exhibition exceeds by far any acceptable compromise and it also influences the message of the exhibition and its narrative line.

3.1. The roots of Europe

Described in complex above. Quotation of one comment made by participant of the tour:
„I would expect more about historical bonds between European nations: starting from the Ancient Mediterranean world, through Christianity (including Jewish roots). Issues like urban communities and urban self-government, universities, circulation of books and ideas, economic routes, inventing and spreading of capitalism, parliamentarian, republican and democratic traditions, human rights in their modern and pre-modern concepts. European architecture and arts from the ancient, byzantine and medieval art, renaissance through modern art.”

3.2. Colonialism

The 19th century part of the exhibition concerning the role of Europe in the world is one-sided. It presents Eurocentrism and a ideology of superiority, exploitation and racist ideas only. Regardless of the evil of colonialism, Europe offered to the world also great cultural and technical civilization input, which influenced the overall development and which is missing in the exhibition.

But even this one-sided presentation is missing certain important aspects - no facts or numbers are presented about countries involved in the slave trade and colonialism – who had which colonies, the extent of human rights violations, human suffering, etc.

There is a lack of more detailed data – the general presentation of colonial crimes and abuse of power does not include concrete examples and numbers, like e. g. the genocide in Congo by the Belgian power, German crimes in Namibia, etc.

Disturbing artefacts are presented – coloured casts of real human heads with closed eyes - with no explanation of their origin, purpose or use, and why they should be exhibited here.

3.3. World War I

This is the best part of the exhibition, with quite a fair explanation of the roots and tragic effects of the war. One can see that the results of a big effort of research and awareness raising regarding the history of WW I in connection with the 100th anniversary were taken into account. Correct presentation of the war as the first major conflict that involved whole societies, not only armies.

However, also in this part one can find strange formulations – e.g. that nationalism and Slavic expansionism are responsible for the outbreak of WWI. It is hard to understand what „Slavic expansionism“ means and what its influence on the outbreak of WWI was.

The Spanish Flu is not mentioned. It killed up to 50 million people in 1918-1920, and its severity was a direct consequence of the war.

However, this is just a minor criticism, and this part is the strongest in the whole exhibition.

3.4. Interwar period

The presentation of two totalitarianisms as two sides of the same coin is in principle correct.

The biggest problem of this part is the fact that the Soviet totalitarianism is only defined as Stalinism, ignoring the Bolshevik and Lenin's mass terror since 1917. Also, the lack of attention to the Soviet crimes such as the Holodomor is obvious. Also, the deeper presentation of the social, historical and other reasons for totalitarianism is missing - and the long-lasting impact of totalitarian regimes on societies. Totalitarianism is represented only on the surface, as a matter of the dictators, who seem to be demonized. In general, a proper presentation of the phenomenon of totalitarianism, based on thorough academic research and contemporary academic knowledge is needed in the museum.

The importance of nationalism in the transition to authoritarianism or dictatorships is overrepresented. Until today, the view from the Western part of Europe includes, on some occasions, certain elements of patronising. The birth and development of national states in Eastern Europe has a central place in the historical identity of many nations in Eastern Europe and that has to be taken in account.

The statement that creating new states was a cause for problems in European politics is formulated from an arrogant perspective of the Great Powers. Was it rather not German revisionism and imperial Soviet policies?

Missing aspects:

- 3.4.1. Role of the Treaty of Versailles
- 3.4.2. Russian civil war
- 3.4.3. Polish-Bolshevik War 1919-1920
- 3.4.4. Wars of independence of Baltic states and Finland
- 3.4.5. Definition of totalitarianism
- 3.4.6. Role of the Great Depression in shaping extreme political ideologies
- 3.4.7. Holodomor - a genocide of the Ukrainian nation in 1932-1933 which claimed the lives of 7 million people.
- 3.4.8. Great Terror, Moscow show trials.
- 3.4.9. Not enough attention to the forced collectivization.
- 3.4.10. Lack of maps: of the German concentration camps and Soviet Gulag.
- 3.4.11. Explanation of the Gulag phenomenon.
- 3.4.12. Information about the Soviet mass deportations.
- 3.4.13. Information about the victims of Soviet repressions in Russia, Ukraine and other Soviet Republics before WWII.
- 3.4.14. Failure of the League of Nations

3.5. World War II

As it was already stated, the part devoted to the history of World War II is too small compared to its significance for Europe. The meaning of World War II for the history of

Europe in 20th century is crucial, it stood also as a basis for European integration (this factor is completely absent in the exhibition).

Missing aspects:

- 3.5.1. Not enough attention to the Shoah and other genocides (for instance the Sinti and Roma genocide).
- 3.5.2. Vichy collaboration regime and its co-responsibility for Shoah.
- 3.5.3. Not enough space and attention dedicated to the Soviet crimes.
- 3.5.4. The Warsaw Uprising and the role of the Home Army are missing.
- 3.5.5. Not all crimes and massacres of WWII are depicted.
- 3.5.6. Not all victims of Communism and Nazism are represented.
- 3.5.7. Not enough information about the events on the Eastern front are presented.
- 3.5.8. Not all main resistances are depicted.
- 3.5.9. The issue of the collaboration in the countries occupied by two different occupation powers is not presented in its complexity.

3.6. Cold War and the „Iron Curtain”

The Cold War is presented continuously as a rivalry of two equal blocs, without distinction between the world of democracy and European values and the totalitarian Communist system forcibly introduced by the Soviet Union in the Central-East European states under violations of human rights and democratic principles, which is unacceptable. One can see it in the statement: „Finally, two political systems were established: democracies in the West and socialist republics in the East, where communist parties played the main role“. Even the presentation of posters (eastern and western) without any comment deepens that feeling.

The economic nature of Communism is not presented in the exhibition – there is a statement that in Communist countries in the 1970s, “economic growth was replaced by stagnation“ (!). One can hardly speak about economic growth in the Communist bloc after the Communist takeover after WWII. Upon seizing power, the Communists nationalised, expropriated, stole and destroyed private economy and devalued the currency, creating unwieldy, unproductive state enterprises and cooperatives which could not match the productivity and output of the economy in the West. The permanent shortage of basic goods typical for planned economies should also be better presented.

The stress is put instead on “positive”, consumerist aspects of Communism, not covering properly the other aspects that can give a more complex and truthful image of what Communism was in Eastern Europe and the USSR after 1945, its human costs, the all-permeating fear, the absence of democracy, justice or the rule of law, its system-immanent violations of all fundamental human rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of belief, freedom of residence, freedom of movement, freedom of association, etc.

Missing aspects:

- 3.6.1. Armed anti-Communist resistance in the entire Communist bloc, especially in the Baltic States, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria.

- 3.6.2. Soviet famine (1946-47) in Moldova, Ukraine and Russia, as an effect of Stalin's policy.
- 3.6.3. Dissident and oppositional movements in Eastern and Central European countries, the phenomenon of illegal publishing, samizdat.
- 3.6.4. The political control of the public sphere, censorship.
- 3.6.5. The Berlin Wall as the symbol of the Cold War.
- 3.6.6. The killings of people at the Iron Curtain who attempted to escape to the West.
- 3.6.7. Nuclear arms race
- 3.6.8. Incorrect representation of the Polish debates about the Holocaust.
- 3.6.9. Uprising of 17 June 1953 in East Germany.
- 3.6.10. 1956: Hungarian revolution (short footage without any explanation cannot be treated as presence of the topic).
- 3.6.11. 1968: the Prague Spring and its crushing by the Warsaw pact invasion (short footage without any explanation cannot be treated as presence of the topic).
- 3.6.12. The scale of repressions and persecution of the Communist states against their own citizens.
- 3.6.13. Mass surveillance, secret police (Stasi, KGB etc.).
- 3.6.14. Civic and human rights movements in the Eastern bloc arising alongside with the Helsinki peace process – e.g. the Charta 77 movement in Czechoslovakia
- 3.6.15. Martial law in Poland.
- 3.6.16. Forced confinement in psychiatry, persecution of dissidents.
- 3.6.17. The exhibition does not depict the general atmosphere of the fear, indoctrination and state control in the Communist countries.
- 3.6.18. Lack of information about the countries occupied by the USSR.
- 3.6.19. Lack of information about the violation of human rights: Freedom of speech, freedom of belief and religion, freedom of movement.
- 3.6.20. The phenomenon of the Underground Church.
- 3.6.21. One party system, no alternative party, ideology, choice.
- 3.6.22. Prohibition, discrimination or persecution for the listening of Western radio stations, music, following the Western lifestyle and fashions.
- 3.6.23. The important role of Western broadcasters in spreading truthful information, Western/today's European values – freedom, democracy, justice, the rule of law, protection of human rights, etc. - and supporting domestic opposition in the Eastern bloc (Voice of America, BBC, Deutsche Welle, Radio Free Europe...)
- 3.6.24. Black market phenomenon, corruption etc.
- 3.6.25. Roots of European integration, lack of clear chronological line of its development.
- 3.6.26. Soviet support for the Communist parties in the West.
- 3.6.27. Communist bloc support of leftist terrorism in the West, political murders, abductions, etc.
- 3.6.28. Communist bloc support of leftist nationalist movements, coups and installation of leftist and pro-Communist governments in Asia, Africa and the Middle East - especially military and secret police training, arms deliveries, etc.

3.7. The end of the Cold War

The story in the exhibition about the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Europe is very limited. The exhibition forms the conclusion that the Communist regimes in different European countries disappeared on their own. This is false. Such an impression is the result of insufficient information in the exhibition about the strength of the growing opposition movements and about the public protests and their brutal suppression by the Communist governments. (e. g. the events in 1989 in Romania, or 1991 in Vilnius, Riga).

There is no sufficient explanation of the role of the arms race with the USA and NATO which de facto depleted the resources of the USSR and supported the process of dismantling of the Eastern bloc. There is no sufficient explanation of the meetings of the U.S. American and Soviet leaders Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s and the accords between the two powers, underlying this process.

The total collapse of the Soviet-style economy is commented only with an absurd phrase: „Communists were proud of their ideals of social justice, however in some countries people lacked food and basic goods, in other people escaped“ (sic!).

There is no explanation why Eastern Europe strived towards the EU, the role of European values in that process.

Missing aspects:

- 3.7.1. The role of Pope John Paul II, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the collapse of Communist regimes in the Central Europe.
- 3.7.2. Economic reasons for the fall of Communism.
- 3.7.3. Events in the individual countries (in the movie, 5 minutes are devoted to the events in Germany, while only 2 minutes to other countries, although the fall of Communism did not start in Germany and even was not the most dramatic there).
- 3.7.4. The problem of coming to terms with the Communist past (for a wider understanding of integration processes in Europe, there is a need to look at issues of declassification of archives, restoration of justice, recognition of crimes of Communism, and rehabilitation of victims of these crimes).

4. Factual mistakes

The participants of the study visit were not able to get familiar with the complete set of texts presented on the exhibition. However, during the study of the exhibition, certain historical and technical errors were revealed:

- 4.1. The statement that the roots of Christianity reach the Middle Ages (2nd floor, part about the roots of Europe), is a basic falsification. Christianity became popular in ancient Rome - in 313 Constantine I issued the Edict of Milan, officially legalizing Christian worship. On 27 February 380, with the Edict of Thessalonica put forth under Theodosius I, the Roman Empire officially adopted Trinitarian Christianity as its state religion.

- 4.2. The statement that 'Countries eastern to the „Iron Curtain“ introduced communism' (2nd floor, part about the roots of Europe) is fundamentally false, as they were forced by the Soviet Union with Red Army, NKVD and Smersh. The same statement follows on the 4th floor, where it says that "in the East, socialism of the Soviet type prevailed".
- 4.3. The map of WW II in Eastern Europe is probably based on some translated Soviet map from the era of the Cold War - Tallin instead of Tallinn, Vilno instead of Vilnius, Kovno instead of Kaunas and so on.
- 4.4. The treaty of Potsdam in 1945 formally did not decide – as mentioned in the exhibition – that the area east of the rivers Oder and Neiße (especially Silesia, Eastern Pomerania and Eastern Prussia) become a new part of Poland; this was reserved to a later international conference (which did not take place finally).
- 4.5. There are some printing mistakes in dates. In the display of the Klooga concentration camp it is written that together with SS also Estonian Police was responsible for the management. Estonia was occupied and no Estonian Police existed. There was a police force as a part of German *Ordnungspolizei* that was recruited from among the local Estonian population.
- 4.6. Maria Skłodowska-Curie was of Polish origin, in the exhibition her Polish surname (Skłodowska) is missing.
- 4.7. "In 1940 Ulmanis was forced to resign under pressure from the Soviet Union, which would subsequently occupy Latvia". This statement is false. It will be correct to say: "In 1940 the Soviet Union attacked Latvia, and as a result of its ultimatum, subsequently occupied the whole country".

The explanation: In fact, the Soviet Union attacked three Latvian Border Posts on 15 June, 1940, killing 3 border guards and two civilians. 37 people were taken as hostages to the USSR. On 16 June the Soviets gave an ultimatum to the Latvian Ambassador in Moscow – the Latvian government must resign and be replaced by a government designated by the USSR, and allow the entry of Soviet troops in unlimited numbers. (In accordance with the Mutual Assistance Pact of October 1939, the Soviet Union already had 50 000 troops in Latvia - more than the whole of the Latvian army). Latvia decided to capitulate, and on the same day the Latvian Prime Minister Ulmanis handed in the resignation of the Latvian government to the Latvian President Ulmanis (he occupied both posts). President Ulmanis stayed as the nominal head of state until 21 July 1940.

- 4.8. In the part «Presentation of the road to WWII» the chronicle of mass starvation in 1921-1922 in the Volga territories (Russia) is used in the context of Stalin's policy at the beginning of the 1930s, which is a significant historical mistake.
- 4.9. In the exhibition these events are defined as a mass starvation that occurred as a consequence of collectivisation, mainly in Ukraine and the Caucasus. This statement is incorrect. During the last 20 years, a number of proofs were revealed and promulgated. They have proven that millions of people were killed by the Soviet regime led by Stalin, because those people were Ukrainians and they resisted the policy of collectivisation.

Moreover, they tried to separate from the USSR and wanted to live in an independent state.

- 4.10. “Around 500 000 men from all over Europe entered the SS. Some were drafted, but many joined voluntarily. In the Baltic States, occupied by the Soviets since 1940, many collaborated with the Nazis, who were seen as liberators”. There are some factual errors. Firstly, it should be the *Waffen-SS*, as non-Germans could not enter the SS. Secondly, in Latvia there were more draftees than volunteers. Thirdly, apart from isolated cases, the “collaboration” in Latvia was with the German occupation forces, not with the “Nazis”. There were no Quisling or Vichy equivalents in Latvia, simply because the Germans did not allow that level of Latvian participation.
- 4.11. The display of “Fascist party symbols” also shows the swastika. Which Fascist party had this symbol? Fascism and National Socialism were different ideologies.

5. Conclusions

The House of European History is an institution organized under the umbrella of the European Parliament. The European history exhibition should present common European values and ties between European nations. It should also reflect the achievements of European culture. The European integration process should be presented as based on the principle of freedom, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights as an alternative to the totalitarian and authoritarian concepts or the system of big powers controlling smaller nations and dividing the continent according to their interests.

The Exhibition fails at presenting European history in three dimensions.

1. Structure. Too short presentation of the roots of European unity and the history of the continent before 1789. It is much too focused on the political perspective. Too little interests and attention for the perspective of medium-sized and small countries.
2. Concept. The exhibition does not focus on common values and ties. It presents a very critical assessment of European history as a history of violence and prejudices to be overcome by an integration process, focusing on bureaucratic aspects rather than common values.
The presentation of totalitarianism and the Cold War is not satisfactory. The exhibition fails in presenting the criminal nature of Communist rule and the imposition of the Soviet system in Central and Eastern European countries. Embarrassing, sometimes outrageous statements concerning Communism are present. The poor presentation of the Shoah doesn't meet its significance in European history.
3. Facts. Some mistakes create the impression of an ideological bias that leads for instance to belittling or omitting to mention Communist crimes. Other factual mistakes can reflect complicated structure of the narrative and should be easy to correct.

An important cause for the failure to meet the goals of the exhibition, i.e. to present common values and ties between European nations, emerges partly from the fact that the exhibition

was prepared in a non-transparent way, with a lack of any broader discussion about the method of presenting European history. Any attempts to begin the debate as well as any critical remarks were refused. A proposal by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience to participate in the work (as its 55 member institutions have substantial experience and expertise in the presentation of history, especially the heritage of the totalitarian past) made in person to the chief curator was rejected in 2012.

As a result, visitors get an ideologically biased, chaotic narrative line with many shortcomings or even falsifications. The main idea is missing, seems to be overshadowed by the narrow-minded Marxism-rooted concept. Especially in the parts describing history of the nineteenth century, the history of the Cold War and in the presentation of European roots this ideological perspective is burdening and prevails over presentation of facts and processes.

To sum up:

Giving the fact that the exhibition is presented under the umbrella of the European Parliament, 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. In the opinion of the members of the **Platform of European Memory and Conscience** the best solution would be work out a new concept of the exhibition properly defining its goals. The new concept of the exhibition should be worked out and consulted with broader circles of scholars, museum professionals and experts from institutions of remembrance and history education from all EU member states.



DRAWING INSPIRATION from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law,

RECALLING the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent and the need to create firm bases for the construction of the future Europe,

CONFIRMING their attachment to the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law, (...)

From the Preamble to The Lisbon Treaty

Photographs on the front cover - clockwise, from top to bottom: House of European History, Brussels; Platform of European Memory and Conscience study group; a showcase with EU poster including five hammer and sickle symbols, a golden relief with Lenin, a commercial product with a large hammer and sickle symbol and a T-shirt with Russian AEROFLOT logo; scene from film with Marx, Engels and Bakunin as leaders of European thought.

Contact:

Platform of European Memory and Conscience
Londýnská 43, 120 00 Praha 2
Czech Republic
tel.: +420 – 222 561 053
www.memoryandconscience.eu
www.memorialbrussels.eu

Dr. Paweł Ukielski
Member, Executive Board
tel.: +48 – 509 697 013
ukielski@poczta.onet.pl