

## **The House of European History, 2007-2020**

A first step towards the realisation of the House of European History was the formation of a team of scientific experts. On 12 November 2007, the Bureau of the European Parliament agreed to the establishment of a scientific panel, the Council of Experts.<sup>i</sup> Hans Walter Hütter, the director of the Bonn House of History, was chosen to lead this team. Since the President of the European Parliament had "never left any doubt that the House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany should be a role-model for the European project", it was only natural to enlist the experience and expertise of its director. For Pöttering, it was absolutely a matter of course to tap the wide-ranging knowledge of this German historian and museum expert for the project of creating the House of European History. Hütter recounts his experience as follows:

"The expert commission in Bonn consisted of four colleagues at the time. In Brussels there were several more. A report on the basic fundamentals, the debates in parliament, in the parliamentary groups and in the Bonn public as well as in Brussels and in Europe. At that time in Bonn, the process of establishing the House had proceeded in the midst of the so called 'historians' dispute', which was much more heated back then. In addition, there were the purely museum-related questions about design, objects, designers, technology. All these practical questions, which were discussed in Bonn at the time without the help of a guiding model, could in Brussels be discussed against the background of experience. We were also able to assess whether, based on that experience, a collection should be set up and recommended that this be done in Brussels. Even more important were the experiences with the institutional organisation and the scientific independence of such an institution. We were also able to draw on the experience we gained in Bonn with maintaining a distance from politics and we recommended doing this. People in Brussels really did listen attentively."<sup>ii</sup>

The nine-member Council of Experts was supplemented by numerous academics of Europe-wide renown. In selecting this team - a process in which the President of the European Parliament was in no way involved - Hütter and his deputy, the Polish contemporary historian Włodzimierz Borodziej, paid great attention to diversity in terms of scientific focus, origin, gender and, last but not least, political orientation.<sup>iii</sup>

### **8.1. Between scientific controversy and political criticism**

In less than a year, the multinational team of academics developed the "Conceptual Foundations for the House of European History". In that document the experts defined an educational mission for the multilingual museum-to-be. It was to "deepen the knowledge of Europeans of all generations about their own history [...]" and promote "understanding of the development of Europe in the present and the future". To accomplish this, the experts on history and museums recommended that the structural foundations and commonalities of European history be elaborated and presented. The Council of Experts placed the focus of the House's content on the period of the 19th and 20th centuries. Of course, the main focus was on the backgrounds, motives and processes within the context of European integration: "The exhibitions were to make clear that a united Europe can live together peacefully in a world of progress on the

basis of common values."<sup>iv</sup> Admittedly, there were controversies within the Council of Experts as to which aspects the future museum should present and which it should not. No political influence was brought to bear on this scientific body. Hans Walter Hütter emphasises:

“Pöttering did not interfere in discussions about content. He always asked questions with interest but did not exert any influence, for the sake of the institution's independence. That was his credo from day one: such an institution must be independent and based on science. An institution of this kind that is not independent will not be accepted by the population and visitors in the long term. Pöttering always took this to heart.”<sup>v</sup>

On 15 September 2008, the Council of Experts reached a consensus on the adoption of the concept. While this agreement caused relief in political circles sympathetic to the project, and made Pöttering very happy, the experts' work, which until then had taken place behind closed doors, attracted criticism in European academic circles. The renowned Swiss historian of Europe, Georg Kreis, complained that while the concept contained "much that was right and valuable", it "lacked an inspiring idea". This shortcoming he believed to be certainly due in part to the limited working time of the expert panel. The prominent critic did approve of the planned combination of permanent and temporary exhibitions in the House of European History, the planned development of a separate collection of objects, the planned multilingual exhibition on more than 4,000 square metres with audio-visual media, the aim of attracting as many visitors as possible and the launch at a "central location". With a view to the substantive content produced by the experts around Hütter and Borodziej, however, Kreis was critical. He claimed that "the 'content baselines' had been laid out in a highly amateurish manner": "Nothing, absolutely nothing of what had previously been announced as the goal and purpose can be discerned." In terms of content, Kreis stated that the "Conceptual Foundations for the House of European History" failed to account for "the conditions behind the development of the bourgeoisie and its effects on overall development". He deplored the absence of a reference to "the Magna Carta and to the emergence of parliamentarism" as well as "to the development of the law". Describing the document as a "chronologically laid out epic", he launched into a scathing all-out attack on the Council of Experts:

“One does not get the impression that actual professional historians have been at work here. On the contrary, one rather suspects it to be the work of armchair historians who think they have to fill up spaces of the past by listing historical events, without making it clear which questions the various findings of fact are meant to 'answer'.”<sup>vi</sup>

Even before the House of European History had opened its doors, it was already being harshly criticised. Of course, the reasons for this were probably not only related to its content. The fact that the decisive academic debates had been conducted exclusively within the framework of the Council of Experts - and thus behind closed doors - may well have offended some representatives of the historian community. The German historian and educator Volkhard Knigge, who has been director of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation since 1994, criticised the "top-down character" of the project, which he described - quite rightly - as a "product of barely

publicised European cabinet politics. He warned that a debate on the legitimate forms and conditions of historical politics in a transnational framework was urgently needed. The cause of the criticism by large parts of academia can undoubtedly be traced back to a "secretive [...] public relations approach"<sup>vii</sup> in connection with the creation of the House of European History. Yet those academically responsible for the project were aware of the validity of the criticism regarding the lack of transparency. Borodziej, the deputy chairman of the Council of Experts (and later chairman of the Scientific Advisory Board), had even pointed this out to the "spiritual father" of the project:

"While I was not the only one who for years never tired of emphasising that the reluctance to take on an active public presence was placing a burden on the project in all milieus outside of the EP, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees insisted on involving academia, museum practitioners, etc. only to a limited extent."<sup>viii</sup>

This was in fact the only controversy between Pöttering and Borodziej. Ultimately, however, the experienced political professional - who in any case was politically responsible for the project - decided to maintain the greatest possible public restraint. Primarily, Pöttering wanted the key political decisions to be made in favour of the project before the academic discourse was allowed to pick up speed. The primacy of politics had to apply to the creation of the House of European History.

By proceeding cautiously and carefully, the experienced EU strategist delayed any potential political backlash against the project, which was still in the planning stage. This is probably one of the reasons why there was actually less criticism of the project than Pöttering had expected. While the anticipated massive resistance on the part of Eurosceptics did eventually manifest itself<sup>ix</sup>, the objections articulated by more moderate circles, which included constructive proposals, were surprisingly few in view of the project's ambition. Looking back, the German Christian Democrat recalled Wolfgang Schäuble's dictum when he declared with a knowing smile that the absence of criticism is the highest form of praise.<sup>x</sup>

The relative scarcity of objections to the House of European History also meant that progress could be achieved more rapidly: only three months after the publication of the "Conceptual Foundations"<sup>xi</sup>, a second important political hurdle on the way to this museum of Europe was cleared on 15 December 2008 when the Bureau of the European Parliament adopted the document, and thereby officially endorsed the House's creation<sup>xii</sup>. Nevertheless, almost one and a half years had passed since its announcement in Pöttering's programmatic speech. This meant that only one good year remained until the German Christian Democrat had to hand over his office to his successor. In other words, he only had twelve months left to push the project forward from his powerful position at the head of the European Parliament. After all, the approval of the Bureau was one thing: it was another thing entirely to secure majority support in the plenary for the House of European History and above all for its financing.

Accordingly, it was first necessary to ensure that the supporters of the project identified so far in the parliamentary groups and other institutions were integrated into the project in a sustainable and structured way. This was done by establishing a political "steering

committee", namely the Board of Trustees, on 18 February 2009, i.e., a good six months before the upcoming change of leadership. The Board of Trustees was to include "as many political orientations as possible". This was achieved in addition to Pöttering, who took over the chairmanship of this body while still President of Parliament (and still holds it), the initial members were the Spanish socialist, Miguel Martínez as his deputy; the author of the report on the creation of the EPC named after him, former Belgian EC Commissioner, Étienne Davignon; the French Green politician and Vice-President of the European Parliament, Gérard Onesta; the Minister-President of the Brussels Region, Charles Picqué; the Polish politician of the national conservative PiS, Wojciech Roszkowski; the British Liberal and Vice-President of the European Parliament, Diana Wallis; the French-born chairman of the Left in the European Parliament, Francis Wurtz; the German chairwoman of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture (and party colleague of Pöttering), Doris Pack; the Greek socialist and representative of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture, Chrysoula Saatsoglou-Paliadeli; the French chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Budgets and EPP group colleague, Alain Lamassoure; the EU Commissioner for Education and Culture, Ján Figel; the chairman and vice-chairman of the Council of Experts of the House of European History, Hütter and Borodziej; and the chairman of Goldman Sachs International and former Irish EU Commissioner, Peter Sutherland. The composition of the Board of Trustees was thus based on both political and functional considerations<sup>xiii</sup>, since it was important to integrate all political forces - with the exception of the political right - not least to secure a future majority in the plenum. It was also a matter of involving other actors who seemed pertinent to the project, such as the Commission, which was a potential sponsor, and the Minister-President of the Brussels region, who broadly speaking represented the Belgian administration.

Pöttering, the "founding father" (as described by Constanze Itzel) of the museum, as a veteran of the European Parliament with plenty of experience with all EU institutions and procedures, was more than aware of the imperative need for this multilateral and multidimensional approach. His closest advisors, too, had strongly recommended it to him. With his position at the head of the Board of Trustees, he also secured for himself an influence on the project that extended beyond his presidency. Between February and July 2009, he even held a doubly influential position as President of the EP and chair of the steering committee. During and after these six months, Pöttering had to act as a skilful moderator and or who had to reconcile a range of opinions on the sometimes controversial project. It was a responsibility similar to the one he had as EPP-ED group chairman. He consistently acted according to the maxim coined by Egon Klepsch: the chairman knows what he wants before the parliamentary group meeting. He then lets his colleagues speak before summarising - in a subtle manner, mind you - what he already knew at the beginning.<sup>xiv</sup>

The central task of the Board of Trustees was to act as a catalyst for the initiatives coming from the Council of Experts or the Scientific Advisory Council. It turned the experts' ideas into basic political concepts and sought to initiate the decision-making

processes necessary for their realisation. After the suggestions of the actors practically involved in the establishment of the museum were presented to the Board of Trustees, it in turn approached the Bureau of the European Parliament and the committees responsible for drafting the corresponding resolutions in the European Parliament. It was through this structured and differentiated process of decision-making and communication that the draft resolutions received their "legitimacy" - and legitimacy was of the utmost importance.<sup>xv</sup>

It was also necessary to find the right location for the museum. In order for the House to become a physical reality, the Secretary-General of the European Parliament, Harald Rømer (who had been from 1992-1997 the deputy secretary-general of the EPP group), who was in office from 2007 to 2009, agreed, in close consultation with Pöttering, to the purchase of the Eastman building in Parc Léopold, not far from the European Parliament buildings in Brussels. Although a definitive political decision in favour of the museum had not yet been taken, Rømer, a far-sighted veteran in administrative matters, had acquired the building, originally used as a dental clinic, on a 99-year lease for the European Parliament. In this role, he was just as instrumental to the project as his German successor. After the purchase of the Eastman building, the secretariat of the European Parliament invited tenders and commissioned an architectural office for the enlargement and conversion of the acquired property. The contract was ultimately awarded to a consortium of three architectural firms from Belgium, Germany and France, whose plans were then put into effect starting in December 2012.<sup>xvi</sup>

While the technical-organisational questions of the future museum could be settled through the acquisition and conversion of the Eastman building, the question of whether a majority in the plenary could be assembled in support of the project - and above all its continued financing - remained unresolved. Still committed to a gradual approach, Pöttering, who had after leaving the office of President on 14 July 2009 returned to the status of a "mere" MEP, tried to secure the consent of other influential elected representatives. And the most influential ones in this case were those sitting on the Culture Committee and in the Committee on Budgets. In retrospect, Pöttering himself says that the work of persuading them really came down to "old-fashioned, intense face to face conversations"<sup>xvii</sup>. It was relatively easy to win over his colleagues on the Culture Committee by convincing them to refrain from publishing a major report on the planned undertaking. "If the Culture Committee had intervened with a report, the Board of Trustees would no longer have been in control of the process". Pöttering skilfully prevented a possible loss of power and significance of the Board of Trustees by "artfully intertwining responsibilities" of key personnel: the chair of the Culture Committee, Doris Pack, and the Greek representative of the Socialists had already been deliberately integrated into the Board of Trustees.<sup>xviii</sup> Interference by the Culture Committee was therefore no longer a concern.

Convincing the Committee on Budgets, on the other hand, proved far more difficult. "Dissatisfaction about the costs caused by the ex-President" was growing steadily

among the members of that influential committee. In mid-2010, one noted that "2.5 million euros have already been earmarked for related assessments" in the EU budget for the coming year, "although the construction of such an EU museum has so far not been approved"<sup>xxix</sup>. About ten months later, in March 2011, the committee members were finally confronted with the estimated costs of the House of European History. "Some were positively frightened", because, as u was put in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*:

"The sum in the single-digit millions that the necessary conversion [of the Eastman building] was supposed to cost has now grown to 55 million euros. In addition, the annual operating costs have been estimated at 13.45 million euros without other potential partners such as the EU Commission or the City of Brussels being on board. The sums could potentially rise even further. [...] The widespread impression that Brussels is imposing tough austerity measures on the member states while not saving at all itself is becoming more and more of a problem."<sup>xxx</sup>

Behind closed doors, even party friends criticised that Pöttering had "lost his footing rather quickly" with the projects he had begun as President. <sup>xxi</sup>In fact, the total one-off costs of the House of European History ultimately amounted to €56 million, €30 million of which were dedicated to the conversion of the Eastman building while the remaining €26 million were spent on the design. Against the backdrop of the financial crisis that had since the years 2008/2010<sup>xxii</sup> morphed into the so-called "euro crisis" and the austerity policies imposed in response<sup>xxiii</sup>, "it took extraordinary confidence in the strength of the European idea to build a 'House of European History' at that precise moment in time". Read thus, the assessment in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* was neither inaccurate nor unduly critical.<sup>xxiv</sup>

How were the members of the Committee on Budgets and other parliamentary decision-makers devoted to fiscal restraint ultimately won over to the project? Both the chairman of the Committee on Budgets, Alain Lamassoure (2009-2014), and his successor, Jean Arthuis (2014-2019), both from the EPP, were formally involved in the Board of Trustees. However, their influence alone would not have sufficed to counterbalance the financial hardliners in the committee, who made their opposition to the project known in advance of the annual budgetary votes. The critics either wanted to "bury" the House of European History before it had even been born, or to "suspend the funds for the project, i.e., not to release the money"<sup>xxv</sup>. Indeed, in the Strasbourg plenary debate on 8 March 2011, in the run-up to the adoption of the budgetary rules for 2012, various Liberal, Green and Socialist representatives called for "a business plan" for the House of European History with a breakdown of predicted running costs. Alexander Alvaro (FDP), for example, who like Helga Trüpel (the Greens) did not criticise the project as such, argued that there could be no "wishful thinking, allowing everyone to get what they want. This must be based on sound means and sensible budget management". In contrast, the German Social Democrat Jens Geiger criticised the planned museum project on far more fundamental lines:

"There is an urgent need for greater legitimacy here, because, dear colleagues, I don't find it satisfactory that so far all the initiatives relating to the establishment of this European House of History are based exclusively on decisions of the Bureau and lack

democratic legitimacy. This must change, and above all change in such a way that we know how the operating and follow-up costs of this institution can be covered."<sup>xxvi</sup>

After the budget rapporteurs had made their criticisms, the Green and Socialist groups actually proposed that the money for the museum project be suspended if the financing of all the running costs after the houses opening was not clarified. Pöttering was, as he himself said, not just surprised but highly "alarmed" at this sudden change of attitude on the part of the Greens and Socialists, who had hitherto signalled their approval.<sup>xxvii</sup> Was the House of European History in danger of failing? Now there was only one way out of this "Committee on Budgets crisis": the chairman of the Board of Trustees had to enlist the support of an influential supporter outside the European Parliament.

To that end he turned to EU Commission President Barroso - a "distant" but well-meaning "supporter" of the project.<sup>xxviii</sup> Pöttering had already kept his Portuguese EPP colleague regularly informed about the planned museum of Europe. However, he had so far refrained from involving the Commission or any other EU institution in the project: "It was [...] clear to me," he noted in his memoirs, "that if we involved the Commission and the Council of Ministers already at an early stage, the whole project would be doomed to failure." To the seasoned MEP, achieving a stable consensus among the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament on the ambitious museum project looked like a downright "pipe-dream". The European Parliament itself had, after all, already struggled to reach a consensus<sup>xxix</sup>, Pöttering's deputy on the Board of Trustees, Martínez, agrees with this assessment: "It later became clear to me that the House of European History could never have been created if the Council and the Commission had been fully involved from the beginning."<sup>xxx</sup> Particularly in the configuration of the Council that would have potentially been responsible for the House of European History, i.e. the one dealing with education, youth, culture and sport, there were considerable reservations among some representatives about a genuine European museum in which the nation state was to play only a subordinate role.<sup>xxxi</sup> Since a positive decision by the Council with a qualified majority (55% of the member states, together making up at least 65% of the total EU population)<sup>xxxii</sup> likewise seemed uncertain, the leadership of the Board of Trustees decided that too many cooks (or, in this case, too many institutions) really do spoil the broth.

However, after the foundations of the House of European History had, metaphorically speaking, been laid in mid-2011 (with the adoption of the "Conceptual Foundations", the announcement of the creation of the museum by the Bureau, and the acquisition of the Eastman building), chief curator Pöttering abandoned his previous mono-institutional approach and turned to the EU Commission for support, which soon materialised. In a letter addressed to Pöttering's successor as President of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, the EU Commission President promised on 28 September 2011 that his institution would "come to an agreement with the European Parliament regarding the funding of the House of European History [in order to] ... secure the functioning of the House of European History for the benefit of the European Parliament"<sup>xxxiii</sup>. This assurance from the Commission "removed and

resolved" the deadlock in the Committee on Budgets. The European Parliament approved the necessary funding for the museum, and work on the Eastman building began in December 2012.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The "point of no return" had passed.

By a combination of factual arguments, regular communication, cooperation with and involvement of stakeholders, alertness, insistence verging on impertinence, and trust, the former President of the European Parliament had managed to bring about a final breakthrough for the House of European History in his last legislative period. Admittedly, this success had been achieved in concert with countless comrades-in-arms on the European stage. However, the German Christian Democrat's share in the creation of the "House of Pöttering", as it was once respectfully called by Joseph Daul<sup>xxxv</sup>, is undisputed. Between 2009 and 2014, for example, he had shown staying power. During his many visits to the offices of the members of the Committee on Budgets, he had displayed a can-do attitude and even gone so far as to "get on their nerves" with his "relentless impertinence"<sup>xxxvi</sup>. His reputation as a veritable "marathon European"<sup>xxxvii</sup> and as a reliable partner on the European stage now came to benefit him greatly. The political trust placed in him, even across party lines, proved helpful in launching and implementing the project. For example, he was able to convince Dagmar Roth-Behrendt (SPD), who served as Vice-President of the European Parliament from 2009 to 2012 and was "a strict opponent of the concept" of the House of European History, as well as his party colleague Inge Gräßle, chair of the Committee on Budgetary Control (2014-2019). Both changed their minds and ultimately voted in favour. All the while, he had constant and meticulously kept an eye on the legislative process of the European Parliament. As he explains looking back:

"There are thousands of votes on the annual budget, and if an amendment is overlooked and the parliamentary groups get wrong recommendations, things can go wrong very quickly through purely technical mistakes."

Thus, the gradual and cautious approach adopted from the beginning ultimately proved to be the key to success. In Pöttering's evocative words, it was the "patient setting of small stones" that "in the end created this mosaic". It was this patience and dedication that made the House of European History possible.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

## **8.2. Concept and implementations<sup>xxxix</sup>**

According to the House of European History's "conceptual principles" of September 2008, the permanent exhibition of the planned museum would present the "basic themes of European history".

These themes denoted historical processes that manifested themselves throughout Europe. They included the democratic and nationalist movements of the 19th century, industrialisation, imperialism, the two world wars, the inter-war period with the emergence of authoritarianism as opposed to parliamentary democracies, the United Nations, the Cold War, the development of welfare states, the protest movements in the 1970s and 1980s in both West and East, and much more. European integration then had to be woven into this wider historical context as a "micro-narrative". As far as



possible the presentation of a teleological development leading up from the above-mentioned events to the EC or EU<sup>xi</sup> was to be avoided, recognising the fact that this has been repeatedly criticised by various actors and most recently described as "cultural engineering" (Wolfram Kaiser)<sup>xi</sup>.

In the summer of 2010, the renowned Slovenian cultural scientist, Taja Vovk van Gaal was recruited for the operational task of developing a concept for the museum and its subsequent implementation. Vovk van Gaal was considered the ideal candidate for the position of curator. She had already gained experience in working on museums in her home country<sup>xiii</sup>. At the beginning of 2011, Vovk van Gaal and a small team of barely ten historians and museum experts began working on the concept for the permanent exhibition in Brussels. Under massive time pressure, they completed their work in the summer of 2012.<sup>xiii</sup> The conception of the content of the permanent exhibition was by no means an uncomplicated undertaking. Different ways of thinking and divergent views of history in the north, south, east and west of the continent triggered and continue to trigger controversies even beyond expert circles. In contrast to historiography, where as part of an anthology various individuals make their contributions to what ultimately remains just a collection of separate opinions, the permanent exhibition in the House of European History is the product of genuine supranational European teamwork. This exhibition's narrative history is therefore unmistakably not the product of one author and contains breaks, because individual narratives could only be linked to each other to a limited extent.<sup>xiv</sup> The recruitment and permanent employment of qualified specialists from all over Europe had already proved to be a further challenge. It was not possible to do what is normally done in national contexts and advertise vacancies in a few national papers, nor did EU regulations permit the simple, unbureaucratic and permanent employment of academics as parliamentary staff.<sup>xiv</sup>

It was important that the objects selected for the permanent exhibition should not be nation-centric but relate to European history as a whole<sup>xvi</sup>. It was therefore a question of breaking new ground in terms of content and law. After the fundamental political-ideological debates about European history and "identity" had died down, the development phase of the museum starting in 2011/12 was primarily about tackling practical issues caused by a lack of either human or financial resources. This explains why 99% of the approximately 1,500 objects on display do not belong to the House of European History itself but are merely on loan from other national museums<sup>xvii</sup>. This circumstance does not, however, prevent the House of European History from presenting its visitors with a wide-ranging selection of objects that represent Europe's "unity in diversity". The exhibits include written, pictorial and haptic (touch-based) sources ranging from an allegorical 19th century figurine of Justitia to a drawing from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp (from spring 1945).<sup>xviii</sup>

Since the opening of the museum on 6 May 2017, these exhibits have been presented on five floors in the permanent exhibition. The exhibition is thematically divided into different areas. The first section deals with the question of "Shaping Europe". Here,

the visitor is confronted with the question of Europe's geographical borders and origins, and even embarks on a journey back in time to the origins of the continent's common historical and cultural foundations.

If you then take just a few steps towards the permanent exhibition's next part, you will have skipped over almost 2000 years of history to the 19th century. That second section deals with "Europe: A Global Power". There, the interested public is presented with a contrast between the continent's legal and socio-economic development, coupled with its world power status, and increasing social and nationalistic tensions. These tensions were to culminate in the "Ur-catastrophe of the 20th century" (George F. Kennan). The trajectory of the House of European History then leads right up to that catastrophe: the First World War. This "first industrial-scale war of the masses" brought about not only massive destruction but also the downfall of mighty empires (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire) and the emergence of new nation states (Poland, Czechoslovakia, etc.) after 1918.

The third section of the permanent exhibition deals with the continent's development in the interwar period. Under the theme of "Europe in Ruins", the section focuses on the two poles of this period: Stalinism and national socialism. After an in-depth focus on the Second World War, the exhibition transitions to the section "Rebuilding a Divided Continent"<sup>xlix</sup>. Here the "Milestones of European Unification" are emphasised and set in the context of a bipolar world (order). The permanent exhibition shows how US aid was used to "create the conditions for closer cooperation between the states of Western Europe". On the one hand, the museum's organisers argue that Western Europeans pursued a closer union between them to "establish" themselves as a "third power" between the USA and the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the process of (Western) European cooperation is also interpreted as a way to secure lasting peace on the continent. This latter aspect is particularly important for Pöttering. Here, the ECSC, founded in 1952, is presented as a first step towards integration that fulfilled its intended aim of creating "peace and prosperity" between the former arch-enemies France and Germany. The 1954 failure of the European Defence Community (EDC), on the other hand, is presented as an early "serious setback in the process of European integration". It is therefore evident that the museum certainly does not present a teleological interpretation of history. In order to humanise history, the mostly non-expert visitors to the House of European History are introduced to the EU's founding fathers, such as Jean Monnet or Paul-Henri Spaak. The fifth and final section of the permanent exhibition covers the period from the 1970s to the present day and is entitled "Shattering Certainties". The explosion of energy prices and the end of the global economic boom had raised new socio-economic questions and resulted in the project of creating a single European market. In addition, this section of the House of European History sheds light on the democratisation of the southern European states and the transformation of Eastern Europe after the peaceful revolutions of 1989. Finally, in the sixth section of the exhibition, guests are asked for "praise and the criticism", in keeping with a visitor-oriented and interactive approach!

With this permanent exhibition, the House of European History is trying to contribute both implicitly and explicitly to strengthening Europe. It is certainly not mad Pöttering's mausoleum". On the contrary, thanks to its multinational team and its multilingual exhibition it is a truly European museum. It aims to motivate Europe's citizens to recognise their responsibility for shaping the common future. As Pöttering had suggested in his speech of 13 February 2007, the House of European History undoubtedly and self-confidently sees itself as a vehicle for the fundamental task of promoting democratic and peace-loving education. With the passing away of the generation that personally experienced the Second World War, peace was in danger of being taken for granted. The Museum of Europe is therefore explicitly committed to keeping war's memory alive, to make it clear that the continued and active commitment of all Europeans is necessary to maintain unity. As the museum's current director, the German art historian Constanze Itzel, rightly points out, European unification and the peace that comes with it are not inevitable.<sup>ii</sup>

So far, the House of European History has proven equal to the task. Its conception has been implemented so effectively that it has earned the recognition of esteemed European historians. As Stefan Krankenhagen puts it, the House is impressive "as a museum":

"As a piece of spatial art that relates spaces, subjects and objects to each other, it inevitably connects them with each other, too. As a museum space, the House of European History breathes. It doesn't just breathe any old history - it breathes because its paratexts are arranged in an airy and varied way. In some places it is quiet, in others I am bombarded with sound and music; some objects - like the pistol that started the First World War - are aurally charged and exceptionally well presented; others are serially aestheticised, some are hidden in drawers, others can be used."<sup>iii</sup>

### **8.3. Taking stock and looking ahead**

At the time of writing, the House of European History has been open to interested visitors for almost three years. It is therefore quite challenging to make an interim assessment that is careful and well-founded in respects of contemporary history. The House's political initiator himself, who continues to chair the Board of Trustees, offers some constructive criticism of the House's first three years. As a political project of the European Parliament, it had to overcome enormous obstacles right from the start. "It was the most difficult thing I initiated and saw through in my political life. And if my political activities were to be reduced to just the House of European History, then it would have been worth it."<sup>iiii</sup> The truth of Pöttering's judgement about the difficulties of creating such a museum is proven by the ultimately failed efforts of French President (2007-2012) Nicolas Sarkozy to create his own "Maison de l'histoire de France"<sup>liv</sup>.

The creation of the House of European History had been helped by the fact that key players such as the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel and the EU Commission President, José Manuel Barroso had largely welcomed the project. As a museum, however, the House of European History, which finally opened in 2017 after its inauguration had repeatedly been postponed, certainly fulfilled the expectations that

had been placed in it. In 2019, 200,000 visitors, mainly from Germany, France and the Benelux countries - in other words, mostly Western Europeans - visited the museum. Nevertheless, the chief curator, and thus the person with the main political responsibility for the museum, believes that not only the overall number of visitors, but especially the number of visitors from Central and Eastern European states "can and must be increased": "We have to work on this. Within the framework of the visitor strategy, MEPs from the Baltic States, Poland, etc. should no longer visit only the Parliamentarium with groups of guests invited from their home countries. They should accompany them to the House of European History, too." This could potentially lead to a significant rise in the number of visitors from those countries.

The obvious reason for the modest number of visitors from countries such as Hungary, Croatia or Romania is clearly geography: citizens from Western EU countries visit the House of European History not only as part of delegations visiting MEPs, but also privately as part of a stay in Brussels, because it is simply easier for them to reach the city. On the other hand, guests from Eastern and Central Europe face more difficult journeys and therefore come less often.<sup>lv</sup> It would therefore be quite conceivable that additional museums with a European perspective could be established in cities such as Krakow, Riga or Sofia, in order to make European history more accessible to people there, too. Constanze Itzel agrees that the main challenge of the Brussels museum is to reach "all the people of Europe", as it envisaged in its "conceptual basis". Although the House is designed to function in each of the 24 official languages of the EU, the museum's location means that a majority of visitors are Western European. Itzel calls it a "shortcoming" that the House of European History, with the exception of the digital content, only reaches "half of Europe". It is therefore seeking to cooperate with networks of European history teachers in order to effectively extend its reach across the entire EU.

Echoing Pöttering, Itzel's assessment of the progress made so far is differentiated, but nevertheless "extremely positive" overall. Although she stresses that a museum is "never finished" and that there is still "much to do", she believes that "what has been achieved so far [...] is a good basis for development in the future". According to its director, the House of European History received "much less criticism than expected". Having been recommended by over 90% of visitors, the House of European History achieved almost "communist levels" of visitor satisfaction. In contrast, only an average of 46% of visitors would recommend other Brussels museums. However, Itzel would like to see more "scholarly debate" about her House in particular and the museum's treatment of European history in general, just as she would appreciate more criticism from the professional public<sup>lvi</sup>. In this context, the former chair of the Scientific Advisory Board, Borodziej - succeeded in 2019 by the Austrian contemporary historian Oliver Rathkolb - noted the "uniqueness of the project" and the "competing narratives":

"A house of the history of an entire continent has never existed before. In the EU, 24 languages have equal status - a seemingly technical problem, but one that no other European museum is confronted with. The Union is made up of 28 states, in a sense 28 national presents and, in our context, national pasts and histories."<sup>lvii</sup>

The interim assessments of those mainly responsible for the museum focus on technical-organisational or content-related issues and are critically constructive but predominantly positive. On the other hand, a look at the European media and political landscape reveals a divided picture. The Germans (or the German media), who are known for taking a critical approach to their own history, seem to make predominantly positive judgements. *Die Zeit*, for example, noted that contrary to expectations, the permanent exhibition in the House of European History did not show any signs of "official EU gimmickry", but rather offered "a critical presentation" of the "past 200 years of European history"<sup>lviii</sup>. The *Tages-spiegel*, too, noted that although some areas of the exhibition were "excessively abbreviated, overstaged and Eurocentric", offering only a "truncated form of historiography", the museum was nevertheless "worth a visit":

"For of course it was a Herculean task to turn the national narratives of the European states, which only two generations ago were at war with each other, into a grand common narrative. It takes a transnational approach that nevertheless leaves room for the unique national paths. The exhibition's most important part, the section covering the period from the late 19th to the catastrophic 20th century, is a success."<sup>lix</sup>

The British newspaper *The Guardian* drew attention to the museum's costs, but rightly noted that "those expecting a temple of EU propaganda will be disappointed". While this comment was probably directed at the UK's Brexiteers and Eurosceptics<sup>lx</sup>, criticism of the House of European History proliferated especially in East-Central Europe. Representatives of the Polish national-conservative PiS particularly voiced their disapproval. In their opinion, the permanent exhibition does not adequately present the continent's Christian roots, fails to sufficiently criticise communism, and pays too little attention to Central Europe - including and especially the Polish nation state<sup>lxi</sup>. The Polish Minister of Culture, Piotr Gliński (PiS), even went so far as to explicitly denounce the permanent exhibition's "blatant misinformation and omissions". In a personal letter addressed to the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, he made the questionable claim that the museum left visitors with the completely false impression that states such as Poland, France and Ukraine had been "complicit in the Holocaust" while making Germany appear like the "greatest victim of the Second World War"<sup>lxii</sup>. Gliński's Polish compatriot, the deputy director of the Warsaw Uprising Museum, Paweł Ukielski, delivered a similarly damning verdict, saying that he had discovered a "neo-Marxist narrative" in the permanent exhibition. Unlike Gliński, Ukielski even claimed that the Holocaust was missing "almost entirely". With regard to such at times contradictory and hair-raising accusations, the FAZ, a paper known for its serious reporting, hit the nail on the head:

"A large part of these attacks can be effortlessly refuted by simply looking at the museum; some accusations are simply false and based on ignorance of the exhibition. One is left with no doubt as to Germany's responsibility for the war and the Holocaust."<sup>lxiii</sup>

On the other hand, Jakub Jareš, from the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in the Czech Republic, another historian from East-Central Europe, made the more objective and subtle criticism that the museum had failed to achieve its goal of creating a European narrative. He thus claimed that it was like an "empty shrine". To the Czech

museum expert, the House of European History, envisaged by its creators as a thoroughly communal European museum, comes across as "rather German" because it prioritises dealing with the traumatic past over presenting a real European history<sup>lxiv</sup>.

A look at the multifaceted and heterogeneous opinions on the House of European History undoubtedly reveals a tension at the core of the EU: not only in politics, but also in the interpretation of the past, the advocates of the nation-state struggle with those of the community method. The tension is evident in the House of European History itself: the permanent exhibition in the Eastman building is the visible end result of complex cooperation by international experts. On the other hand, it also highlights the still existing cultural and mental division of Europe. The latter became particularly evident in the handling of the refugee or migration issue.<sup>lxv</sup> One is therefore certainly justified in observing that despite the communal representation of European history in the Eastman building, national and European images of history continue to compete with each other. In the process, separate "memories" are revealed in the different European countries. Of course, this does not diminish in the least the need for the House of European History. The House itself, as well as the debates and controversies about it, can only contribute to raising awareness and overcoming the dividing lines separating the continent's cultures of remembrance. In this lies not only an essential feature, but also the *raison d'être* of the House of European History. After all, the dictum of renowned Swiss author Adolf Muschg remains as true as ever: "That which holds Europe together and that which divides it is essentially one and the same: common memory."<sup>lxvi</sup>

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Pöttering, *Wir sind zu unserem Glück vereint*, p. 475ff.
- <sup>ii</sup> Hans Walter Hütter in conversation with Michael Gehler on 1 February 2018
- <sup>iii</sup> In addition to Hütter and Borodziej, members of the Council of Experts were: Giorgio Cracco, Italian church historian; António Reis, Portuguese historian; Mária Schmidt, Hungarian historian and head of the Budapest Museum 'House of Terror'; Matti Klinge, Finnish historian and expert on Nordic history; Marie-Hélène Joly, French Vice-Director of the Directorate for History, Heritage and Archives at the at the French Ministry of Defence; Michel Dumoulin, Belgian historian; Ronald de Leeuw, Dutch museum curator and historian
- <sup>iv</sup> "Conceptual Basis for a House of European History, quoted from: Pöttering, *Wir sind zu unserem Glück vereint*, p. 476f.
- <sup>v</sup> Hans Walter Hütter in conversation with Michael Gehler on 1 February 2018; *see also*: Hans Walter Hütter, 'Independence and objectivity. A committee of experts lays the foundations, in: 'Creating the House of European History', ed. by Mork/Christodoulou, pp. 27-31.
- <sup>vi</sup> Georg Kreis, "'Europa" ausstellen?', in: 'Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989', ed. by François/Kończal/Traba/Troebst, pp. 525-537, pp. 534ff.
- <sup>vii</sup> Florian Peters, review of: 'Arbeit am europäischen Gedächtnis. Diktaturerfahrung und Demokratiewicklung', ed. by Volkhard Knigge/Hans-Joachim Veen/Ulrich Mählert/Franz-Josef Schlichting, Cologne 2011, <https://www.hsozkult.de/publication-review/id/reb-16513>, last accessed on 3 February 2020; cf. also: Wolfram Kaiser/Stefan Krankenhagen/Kerstin Poehls, 'Europa ausstellen. Das Museum als Praxisfeld der Europäisierung', Cologne 2012.
- <sup>viii</sup> Włodzimierz Borodziej, Unpublished written statement in response to the authors' questionnaire, 9 April 2019.
- <sup>ix</sup> 'House of European History cost estimates double to £137 million', in: The Telegraph, 3 April 2012, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/eu-rop/eu/8424826/House-of-European-History-cost-estimates-double-to-137-million.html>; and: 'EU museum to cost the British taxpayer £19m after building expenses double', in: Daily Mail, 5 April 2011, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1373497/House-European-History-cost-Britons-19m-building-expenses-double.html>, both accessed last 12 February 2020.
- <sup>x</sup> Hans-Gert Pöttering in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 14 September 2019.
- <sup>xi</sup> House of European History Expert Committee, 'Conceptual Basis for a House of European History', manuscript completed October 2008, printed in Brussels, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meet-docs/2004\\_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meet-docs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf), last accessed 3 February 2020.
- <sup>xii</sup> Manuel Becker, 'Geschichtspolitik in der "Berliner Republik". Konzeptionen und Kontroversen', Wiesbaden. 2013, p. 517f.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Pöttering, *Wir sind zu unserem Glück vereint*, p. 480f.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Hans-Gert Pöttering in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 14 September 2019.
- <sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xvi</sup> Hans-Gert Pöttering, 'From idea to realisation', in: 'Creating the House of European History', ed. by Mork/Christodoulou, pp. 18-26, p. 25f.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Pöttering, *Wir sind zu unserem Glück vereint*, p. 482.

- 
- xviii Hans-Gert Pöttering in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 14 September 2019.
- xix Hans-Jürgen Schlamp, 'Dienstwagen für den Ex', in: Spiegel Online, 3 May 2010, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/eu-parlamentarier-poettenng-dienstwagen-tuer-den-ex-a-692363.html>, accessed 7 April 2020.
- xx Christoph Ziedler, 'Das Europaparlament leistet sich ein Museum. Das Haus der Geschichte Europas wird immer teurer', in: Stuttgarter Zeitung, 17 March 2011.
- xxi 'Teure Baustellen. Das Europäische Parlament verschleudert mit umstrittenen Projekten Steuermillionen der Bürger', in: Focus, 8 September 2008.
- xxii Gehler, Europa, p. 677ff.
- xxiii see on this: Niklai Huke/Angela Wigger, 'Vom beschränkenden Dissens zur disintegrierenden Polarisierung. Legitimitätsprobleme der Europäischen Union in der Eurokrise', in: 'Neue Segel, alter Kurs? Die Eurokrise und ihre Folgen für das europäische Wirtschaftsregieren', ed. by Hans-Jürgen Bieling/Simon Guntrun, Wiesbaden 2019, p. 201-228.
- xxiv 'Wurzelwerk. Jetzt bekommt auch Europa sein Haus der Geschichte', in: SZ, 21 March 2013.
- xxv Hans-Gert Pöttering in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 14 September 2019.
- xxvi EP plenary debate, 8 March 2011, Guidelines for the 2012 budget procedure - other sections (debate), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-/EP//TEXT+CRE+20110308+ITEMS+-DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=DE>, last accessed 12 February 2020.
- xxvii Pöttering, Wir sind zu unserem Glück vereint, p. 482f.
- xxviii Constanze Itzel in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 9 April 2019.
- xxix Pöttering, Wir sind zu unserem Glück vereint, p. 483.
- xxx Miguel Ángel Martínez Martínez, Unpublished written statement in response to the questionnaire of the authors on Hans-Gert Pöttering, 3 September 2018.
- xxxi Constanze Itzel in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 9 April 2019.
- xxxii On the qualified majority voting procedure in the Council of the European Union, see: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/qualified-majority/>, last accessed 25 February 2020.
- xxxiii José Manuel Barroso quoted in: Pöttering, Wir sind zu unserem Glück vereint, p. 484.
- xxxiv Constanze Itzel in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 9 April 2019.
- xxxv 'Ein Glücksfall für die Stiftung. Hans-Gert Pöttering feiert seinen 70. Geburtstag', 23 September 2015, <https://www.kas.de/de/veranstaltungsberichte/detail/-/content/ein-grueckstall-fuer-die-stiftung1>, accessed 12 February 2020.
- xxxvi Hans-Gert Pöttering in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 14 September 2019.
- xxxvii Christopf Haverkamp, 'Hans-Gert Pöttering - der Marathon-Europäer', in: NOZ, 27 February 2014. <https://www.noz.de/deutschland-welt/politik/artikel/454889/hans-gert-pottering-der-marathon-europaer#gallery&0&0&454889>, last accessed February 11th 2020.



- 
- xxxviii Hans-Gert Pöttering in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 14 September 2019.
- xxxix Most recently, in detail on the conceptual implementation of the Brussels Museum of Europe: Andrea Mork, 'Das Haus der European History. Konstruktion eines transnationalen Ausstellungsnarrativs', in: 'Das umkämpfte Museum. Zeitgeschichte ausstellen zwischen Dekonstruktion und Sinnstiftung', ed. by Ljiljana Radonić/Heidemarie Uhl, Bielefeld 2020, pp. 41-54.
- xl Constanze Itzel in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 9 April 2019.
- xli Wolfram Kaiser, 'Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project', in: *Journal of Common Market Studies* 3 (2017), pp. 518-534.
- xlii Taja Vovk van Gaal, 'Introduction', in: 'Creating the House of European History', ed. by Mork/Christodoulou, p. 14f., p. 14.
- xliii Taia Vovk van Gaal, 'Step by step towards the House of European History', in: 'Creating the House of European History', ed. by Mork/Christodoulou, pp.14f.
- xliv Constanze Itzel in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 9 April 2019.
- xliv Constanze Itzel, 'Creating a European museum under the auspices of the European Parliament. A unique venture in an unusual environment', in: 'Creating the House of European History', ed. by Mork/Christodoulou, pp. 47-54, p. 50f.
- xlvi Stefan Krankenhagen, 'Gegründet 2017 als House of European History', in: 'Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken' 820 (2017), pp. 64-70.
- xlvii Andreas Fickers, 'Kompromissgeschichte serviert auf dem "Tablet". Das Haus der europäischen Geschichte in Brüssel', in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies* 1 (2018), pp. 173-183.
- xlvi House of European History, 'Museumsführer Dauerausstellung', Luxembourg 2017, pp. 15 and 73.
- xlix House of European History, 'Kurzsführer Dauerausstellung', Luxembourg 2017, pp. 6-11.
- <sup>1</sup> House of European History, 'Museumsführer Dauerausstellung', Luxembourg 2017, pp. 88-93, 110 and 152f.
- <sup>ii</sup> Constanze Itzel in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 9 April 2019.
- <sup>iii</sup> Krankenhagen, 'Gegründet 2017, in: *Merkur* 820 (2017), pp. 64-70.
- <sup>liii</sup> Hans-Gert Pöttering in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 14 September 2019.
- <sup>liv</sup> Florence Evin, 'La Maison de l'histoire de France est enterrée', in *Le Monde*, 27 April 2012, [https://www.lemonde.fr/a-la-une/article/2012/08/27/la-maison-de-l-histoire-de-france-est-enterree\\_1751323\\_3208.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/a-la-une/article/2012/08/27/la-maison-de-l-histoire-de-france-est-enterree_1751323_3208.html), last accessed 18 March 2020.
- <sup>lv</sup> Hans-Gert Pöttering in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 14 September 2019.
- <sup>lvi</sup> Constanze Itzel in conversation with Michael Gehler and Marcus Gonschor on 9 April 2019.
- <sup>lvii</sup> Włodzimierz Borodziej, 'Ein Haus und viele Geschichten. Anmerkungen eines Warschauer Historikers', in: 'Heimat. Vaterland. Europa', ed. by Vogel, pp. 149-158, p. 149.
- <sup>lviii</sup> Matthias Krupa, 'Felert dieses Museum den Kommunismus?', in: *Die Zeit*, 2 May 2018, <https://www.zeit.de/2018/19/haus-der-europaeischen-geschichte-kommunismus-polen>, last accessed 3 February 2020.
- <sup>lix</sup> Christian Schröder, 'Erzählung eines Kontinents', in: *Der Tagesspiegel*, 8 May 2017, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/haus-der-europaeischen-geschichte-in-bruessel-erzaehlung-eines-kontinents/19766984.html>, last accessed 3 February 2020.

- 
- lx 'Brexit through the gift shop: museum of European history divides critics', in: The Guardian, 12 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/12/museum-past-critics-divided-house-european-history>, last accessed 26 February 2020.
- lxi 'PE: na debacie EKR krytyka wystawy Domu Historii Europejskiej', in: Dzieje, 5 September 2017, <https://www.dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/pe-na-debacie-ekr-krytyka-wystawy-domu-historii-europejskiej>, last accessed 26 February 2020.
- lxii 'Poland slams Brussels museum over Holocaust exhibition', in The Times of Israel, 7 October 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/poland-slams-brussels-museum-over-holocaust-exhibition/>, last accessed 26 February 2020.
- lxiii Paul Ingendaay, 'Ist die Geschichte Europas überhaupt darstellbar?', in: FAZ, 2 December 2017, [https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debates/museum-in-bruessel-widmet-sich-europaeischer-geschichte-15319650.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex\\_2](https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debates/museum-in-bruessel-widmet-sich-europaeischer-geschichte-15319650.html?printPagedArticle=true#pageIndex_2), last accessed 18 March 2020.
- lxiv 'Brexit through the gift shop: museum of European history divides critics', in: The Guardian, 18 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/12/museum-past-critics-divided-house-european-history>, last accessed 16 February 2020.
- lxv See: Rafał Dutkiewicz/Helga Hirsch, 'Spaltung Europas. Polen ahmt den Westen nicht nach. Polen ist der Westen', in Die Welt, 23 December 2019, <https://www.welt.de/kultur/plus204524640/Spaltung-Europas-Polen-ist-die-aelteste-Demokratie-der-EU.html>, last accessed 25 February 2020.
- lxvi Adolf Muschg quoted in: Aleida Assmann, 'Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik', Munich 2006, p. 259.