



Network on European and Mediterranean History and Memories (NEHME) - Declaration of Purposes

Signed in Bari, at the Conference “Historical Challenges and Politics of Memory of EU
Mediterranean Countries”, 21-23 October 2021

Preamble

- Aware of the growing relevance that memories play in the public use of the past and as a cultural heritage for individuals and social groups;
- taking into account that the ways of remembering the past influences the practice of contemporary politics;
- considering that European memories reflect experiences that have often divided the continent among states, local and national communities, religious and political beliefs;
- knowing that Europe has been at the origins of two world wars, that it has been split by the Cold War and that its present is still affected by their human tolls and cultural clashes;
- that history is not meant to solve conflicts but to understand them and that it can provide the basis for an appropriate recognition of individual and collective responsibilities;
- that there is a trend in place of norming a usable past which can clash with the freedom of debate and the critical understanding of history;
- that creating a Europe-wide memory is a political goal that cannot be enforced from above but is an open transnational task for all citizens which postulates a permanent effort towards freedom, cultural and social integration, and political unity;
- that the connotation of such memory depends on the degree of democracy at European level;

the undersigned agree to create a Network on European History and Memories aiming at enhancing the awareness of the achievements and fragility of democratic conquests in European history.

Purposes

The Network promotes the knowledge of European history in all its complexity. It aims at a pluralist „European memory”, which respects the principle “unitas in diversitate” taking into account not only the different states but also the different societies, cultural and social stratification of European history. This plural view of the past is meant to support the public awareness of the historical dimension of democracy by including different social and political memories in the rich and dramatic history of the European continent. This means, among others, taking seriously the difference between the history of Europe and the history of European integration, for the use of “Europe” is a reason for misunderstandings that can



be overcome only with open recognition of the novelties of European cooperation and its interplay with the longer and different histories of its member States.

Lack of attention to the different objects and theoretical meanings of Europe can drive to unilateral politics of memory based upon a nationalist conception of history and to a depoliticisation of the role of fascism, against which several European countries have fought and built their democracies.

It can depoliticise the history of authoritarian “real socialist” regimes, too, by removing their premises in the two world wars, the Cold War context, the reasons for their outbreak and decay, their internal clashes. A winners’ politics of memory would feed an ideological “end of history” and the illusion that today’s Europe has nothing to do with the political and economic divisions of its past.

This can result, moreover, into a shortsighted European identity deprived of the long history of the Mediterranean and of the legacy of colonialism, behind which lurks a triumphalistic vision of the present. Mediterranean Europe is here meant as a historically contended space, which broadens the narratives of Europe, for its historicity regimes have after all defined the identity of the continent.

Such an awareness demands for a critical approach to how European memories are being celebrated and appropriated, for only remembrance and recognition of the conflicts about democracy and citizenship that have crossed and still cross the continent can provide a solid basis for dialogue and democratic development in a globalised world.

The Network intends to open a frank debate on the spreading of a normative approach to the past, that can legitimate un- or antidemocratic narratives, based upon exclusive ethnic and territorial identities, which represent a danger for a peaceful and democratic asset of the continent.

Activities

The Network has a non-profit status. For its purposes, the Network:

- a) promotes a free and qualified debate on the history of Europe and of European cooperation, favouring interdisciplinary and transnational approaches to European history and memories;
- b) takes with its members public initiatives such as conferences, seminars, lectures and publishes reports, books etc., adopting any appropriate instrument of public communication;
- c) follows closely the development of public memories and the public use of the past in Europe and in its meaning to the outer world, collecting documents and legislation and making them available for scientific purposes;
- d) intends to coordinate the activity of its members with that of European institutions, such as the Council of Europe, the European Union and other international bodies, providing scientific support and seeking a positive, fruitful cooperation with them;
- e) assists its members in confronting local and national memories within a wider European and global framework;



- f) encourages the formation of young scholars and organizes exchanges among the members through stages, higher education courses and teaching activities;
- g) fosters international research and cooperation on history education, with a focus on citizenship and remembrance education;
- h) can apply for research and educational grants, especially at international level, with all or some of its members.

Membership

Members commit themselves to cope with the general purposes of the Network, such as promoting pluralist and democratic values, and avoiding nationalistic, sciovinistic, or ethnical readings of the past.

The Network is open to qualified historical and cultural bodies such as research institutes, foundations, museums, archives, associations and universities, as well as individual scholars from all social sciences, working on historical memories of Europe and sharing its aims. It will have possibly one member institute acting as a reference point for each country. Its internal organisation will be settled by regulation that will be approved by the founders. The founders will establish an executive committee of at least 7 members and a coordinator of the Network.

Parri Institute, with the assistance of the Jean Monnet Chair of the University of Bari, will provisionally serve as Secretariat of the Network. This includes creating a website devoted to inform the public on the Network and on its initiatives, containing links to the members' Home Pages. Members shall reciprocate with information on the Network and link it in their respective Web sites.