European historical consciousness

2023/2112(INI) - 17/01/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 409 votes to 165, with 35 abstentions, a resolution on European historical consciousness.

Dealing with Europe's past as a risk and an opportunity

Members considered Europe's complex, conflict-ridden and contested past poses both a challenge and an opportunity for European integration. They considered a **responsible, evidence-based and critical approach to history, focusing on common European values**, to be a *sine qua non* for any democratic body, in order to sensitise current and future generations for achievements and aberrations of the past alike, strengthen a self-reflective public discourse and foster understanding and reconciliation within and among particular social groups, nations and states.

Politics of the past in the European Union

The resolution stressed the need for an honest assessment of the EU's 'politics of the past', through which it has striven to add legitimacy to the European project, strengthen a European sense of belonging and foster the peaceful coexistence of the continent's peoples, by equally acknowledging achievements and existing shortcomings, and by scrutinising the ways in which citizens have been encouraged to engage with the past.

Members expressed concern that there continues to be a latent competition and partial incompatibility between different memory frames and remembrance cultures in Europe, including between Western and Eastern Europe, but also between countries and nations within certain parts of the continent. In this regard, they emphasised the need to **bridge existing regional and ideological divides** in historical awareness among European countries and peoples with a view to building a common ground for dialogue as well as mutual understanding and respect.

Towards an informed historical consciousness in Europe

Parliament recognised the need for a **broader and more holistic understanding of European history** for a critical and self-reflective European historical consciousness to emerge, in particular by widening the focus of current European remembrance initiatives, taking into due account also groups that have been underrepresented so far, and by promoting innovative ways of teaching history.

The Commission and the Member States are invited to protect the freedoms to teach, study and carry out research, as well as the freedom of artistic expression, which are currently under threat, in particular through cases of misappropriation of memory laws.

Stressing the **vital role of education**, Member States are called on to update current curricula and teaching methodologies with a view to shifting focus from national towards European and global history and in order to allow for **more emphasis on a supranational historical understanding**, in particular by allowing for multiple perspectives on history and by fostering corresponding teaching styles that favour reflection and discussion over knowledge transfer and that are guided by the overall objective of making students learn 'how to think' rather than 'what to think'.

Members recalled that **learning about European integration, the history, institutions and fundamental values of the Union**, as well as European citizenship, is essential for the emergence of a

sense of belonging to Europe. They called for the teaching of European history and integration and education for European citizenship to become an integral part of national education systems. They stressed the need for interdisciplinary and intersectional history teaching that applies an innovative and learner-centred pedagogy.

The resolution stressed the importance of preserving Europe's rich **cultural and historical heritage** and memorial sites and encouraged the Member States to step up their efforts to define and protect places of democratic memory, especially those related to underrepresented groups.

Deeply concerned about digital channels being increasingly abused for political manipulation and the circulation of disinformation, including concerning history, Members called on the Commission and the Member States to step up their efforts to **strengthen media and digital literacy** and to endow teachers and students with adequate skills and tools facilitating fact-based history teaching, and enabling them to identify, contextualise and analyse traditional as well as modern historical sources.

Outlook: the legacy of the past and the EU's future

Parliament espouses the ideal of a **'culture of remembering'** and historical consciousness based on shared European values and practices in approaching the past, yet at the same time avoiding any undue levelling or simplification of history.

Lastly, Members envisioned collective memories eventually contributing to and merging into a European public sphere, with diverging remembrance cultures complementing each other rather than being in competition, and dealings with history becoming an issue of civic rather than political action.