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# European Parliament public history initiatives and the memory of European unity: some reflections and a blueprint for action

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## Memorias históricas, Memorias incómodas

Historical memories, Inconvenient memories

**A cargo de / Edited by**

Maria Betlem Castellà i Pujols

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# European Parliament public history initiatives and the memory of European unity: some reflections and a blueprint for action[1]

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*Abstract*
While memory of war and its ensuing traumas is well established in Europe, memory of unity and transnational solidarity is harder to coalesce. Among the European institutions, the European Parliament has been playing a prominent role in putting forward initiatives to stir public conversation on Europe's past. Those initiatives are intent on addressing the barriers that prevent the consolidation of a memory of European unity. The development of the Jean Monnet House activities, one of the newest European Parliament visitor facilities, is an opportunity to convey those principles to the public through a hands-on experience.

*Resumen*
Si bien la memoria sobre la guerra - y sobre los traumas que esta trae consigo - está bien establecida en Europa, la memoria sobre la unidad y sobre la solidaridad por encima de las fronteras es de más difícil cristalización. Entre las instituciones europeas, el Parlamento Europeo juega un papel principal en la creación de iniciativas para favorecer el debate público sobre el pasado de Europa. Dichas iniciativas inciden sobre las barreras que dificultan la consolidacion de una memoria de la unidad europea. El desarrollo del programa de actividades de la Casa Jean Monnet, uno de los servicios para visitantes de más reciente creación en el Parlamento Europeo, es una oportunidad

[1] A first presentation of the conceptual ideas presented in this article was made at the University of Santiago de Compostela: 'La guerra en el relato histórico sobre la unidad europea', lecture by the author, organised by Histagra as part of the cycle Pasados Incómodos: Guerra, memoria e historia, 19 April 2016, Geography and History Faculty. <http://histagra.usc.es/es/mediateca/51/video-marti-grau-la-guerra-en-el-relato-historico-sobre-la-unidad-europea> (u.a. 27/01/21). The state of play was presented in the University Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, in the discussion 'Reflections on the Memory of European Unity' by Martí Grau i Segú and Aline Sierp, Seminari permanent del Grup d'Estudis de les Institucions i de les cultures polítiques (segles XVI-XXI), in collaboration with EUROM (European Observatory of Memories) and ISEM (Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea), February 22, 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyBKbCUscWU> (u.a. 27/01/21), as well and in the Memory Studies Association conference in the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, at the special session 'Institutional Memory Politics in Europe', June 26, 2019 of the Third Annual Memory Studies Association, June, 25-28.

para acercar el público a aquellos principios a través de una experiencia directa de un espacio clave en la formación de la historia.

*Keywords*
Memory; European Unity; European Parliament; Jean Monnet

*Palabras clave*
Memoria, Unidad europea; Parlamento europeo; Jean Monnet.



## *1. 'European unity'*

Tolstoy famously began his novel *Anna Karenina* stating that all happy families look alike, whereas all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way. We can paraphrase this to state that, in the public perception, all happy moments go unnoticed, whereas all unhappy moments deserve a story of their own. That might provide for a first level of explanation for why the memory of European unity has been silent until recently, whereas the memory of war is alive and well. As it seems, only bad news is news.

To be sure, in the case of European integration — a catch-all term that often encompasses all institutional developments under the umbrella first of the European Communities and then the European Union — at least two more elements account for that silence. First, its storytelling has been perceived as a summation of indecipherable achievements by men behind desks, wearing grey suits. Yet, Bronislaw Geremek, historian of the disenfranchised of the Middle Ages (Geremek, 1976), and irreproachable Polish political figure who refused to abide by lustration, highlighted the importance of acting on *European memory* (Thines, 2008), when almost no one put those two words together, particularly during his term as Member of the European Parliament and at the time of his tragic death in a 2008 car accident.

Second, accounts of the beginnings of European integration are often surrounded by a deliberate atemporality. Of all the founding fathers, Jean Monnet had a pivotal role in the articulation of the first practical steps: in 1950 he drafted the text with which the French Foreign Affairs minister Robert Schuman would announce to the world the creation of the first European Commu-

nity, devoted to the merging of the coal and steel industries of former WWII combatant countries. Imbued with forward-thinking, Jean Monnet considered an overemphasis on history to be an obstacle for action. While he drew on post-war idealism, in many respects we can say he put the clock of European history back to zero, much like the French Revolution started a new calendar and ultimately re-set the sense of time worldwide (Ouzof, 1976, pp. 262-266). Scholarship often abides by this tabula rasa optic in its analysis of European integration.

In our own analysis, we prefer the term 'European unity' because, beyond the first steps of the institutional machinery, it also encompasses the idealism that preceded them, the wider geopolitical constraints and opportunities that surrounded them, and people's mobilisation to sustain momentum. Choosing the term 'European unity', we believe, means bringing the related narrative closer to its full potential, diminishing the two obstacles mentioned above. This paper explores the following questions: Is it possible to develop a memory of European unity? If so, what is its relationship to a wider memory of solidarity? For a memory regime to take hold, it is necessary to widen the historical context, to assess the deeper roots of such memory underneath its more visible landmarks. How to make this history/memory meaningful and appealing? How to inscribe this memory in the wider canvas of history?

The story of European unity is the story of Altiero Spinelli, the anti-fascist activist who wrote the Federalist Manifesto in 1941, from a penitentiary on the tiny island of Ventotene. It is also the story of the Congress of Europe in 1948 in The Hague, and of the first concrete steps taken in the Schuman declaration, drafted by Jean Monnet (Piodi, 2010). He was a man who always chose to efface himself to better serve the causes he worked for, and who used to give his concise memos to his driver to make sure they would make full sense to the average man. The community created by the declaration was not only concerned with sectoral integration — its ostensible aim — but sought to reach a wide scope of social action: for example, with housing programs of its own (Verschueren, 2016, pp. 249-262). For decades after WWII, the aim of a united Europe mobilized people: "Un autre pays, toujours l'Europe", cheerful demonstrators crossing a border would proclaim in 1957[2]. Other demonstrators would carry a big portrait of Monnet as The Hague relaunched integration in 1969 af-

[2] *Nous l'Europe*. Film. Collection Gaumont (Prima) documentaire. 1958. <https://gparchives.com/index.php?urlaction=doc&id_doc=275492> (u.a. 27/01/21); Plus de frontières. Photo. Keystone, 1952. <https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/demonstration_in_support_of_europe_29_december_1952-en-6cabf1de-f1c7-4b80-ac58-1827421883ee.html> (u.a. 27/01/21).

ter the De Gaulle years (Cohen, 2007, pp. 14-29), or would claim — in 1978, well before the euro was in the pipeline — that a single currency was essential to a united Europe[3]. In 1979, after the outcome of the direct election of the European Parliament, two women were at the helm of the institution: the *président d'âge* Louise Weiss, longstanding European activist, passed the baton to Simone Veil as the first democratically elected president[4].

From Kant's perpetual peace to more recent interrogations about la *finalité de l'Europe* and the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize award to the European institution, the idea of a united Europe always goes hand in hand with other bigger, universal causes. Prominent among them is the cause of peace. However, this exposes the European ideal to at least two contradictions. First, as we will show in this paper, the very few moments in the last 200 years when the international system has been at peace — that is, without the looming possibility of a showdown — have been wasted occasions for European unity. Peace has stirred ideals of unity as much as it has numbed concrete action on them. Admittedly, for most of the last two centuries even the distant prospect of a European *demos* was missing altogether. But when a *demos* began to thrive, through the intertwining of WWII resistance movements and liberations (effective or *manqué*), it was not the sheer bliss of peace, but the sting of fear (Spaak, 1980) which prompted the first actual steps toward unity.

Second, Europe increasingly attaches its own identity to a consubstantial defence of human causes. Paradoxically, by doing so, it might undermine the very causes it champions.

## *2. A blurred memory: War, peace, and the case for European unity*

Lasting peace has long been seen as one of the ultimate goals of European unity. But has peace, in reverse, been conducive to European unity? Retracing European multilateralism in the 19th and 20th centuries and its social representations can bring us closer to an answer.

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[3] Such demonstration for a single European currency took place on 5 December 1978 in Brussels, as the European Council adopted a resolution for the setting up and running of the European Monetary System (EMS). Photo accessible online: "Demonstration for a single European currency (Brussels, 5 December 1978)". Centre Virtuel pour la Connaissance de l'Europe, <https://www.cvce.eu/en/search?q=Demonstration+for+a+single+European+currency+%28Brussels%2C+5+December+1978%29> (u.a. 27/01/21).

[4] Smashing times. *EU 1979: A People's Parliament. A Digital Art Exhibition on Democracy, Human Rights and Women's Political Participation*. Posted on September 20, 2020. <http://smashingtimes.ie/centrefortheartsandhumanrights/eu1979exhibition/> (u.a. 27/01/21).

Peace is not the mere absence of war. An international system primarily built around a singled-out enemy, where conflict escalation is recurrent, can hardly be identified as peaceful. From that perspective, peace has materialized on very few occasions in the last two centuries of European multilateralism. Only during three short periods was multilateralism not organized with the containment of an enemy power as overarching principle. As they unfolded, those moments were viewed as a fertile ground for European unity. But did they live up to that promise?

After the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna settlement and its corollaries (the Treaty of Chaumont in February 1814 and the Treaty of Paris in November 1815) drew a multilateral system aiming at containing France (Webster, 1963, pp. 50s; Nicolson, 1946, pp. 235-239). In 1818 in the Congress of Aix-la-Chappelle, the coalition-winning powers (the Quadruple alliance) admitted France in their midst, thus becoming the Quintuple alliance. As the European powers committed to working together within the so-called Congress system, no new international enemy was consistently identified, but rather a community of interests in fighting a new, internal enemy: the revolutionary movements.

In this context, Europe arrived at unprecedented levels of multilateral activity (Reinalda, 2009, pp. 17-27). The Austrian Chancellor Metternich came to be seen as the pivotal figure of a 'system' commonly associated with his name (although he himself did not believe that an actual system was in place). Through Foreign Secretary Castlereagh, Britain became closely involved in European governance at levels not experienced before or after, something all the more significant in the face of discussion to create permanent structures. Tsar Alexander I toyed with continent-wide designs, oscillating from his early envisioning of a Europe of brotherhood (partly owing to the intellectual influence of his instructor La Harpe) to the repressive Holy Alliance inspired by Mme Krudner's mysticism (Bourquin, 1954, pp. 133-146). The Prussian rulers, not unlike the other statesmen, were confronted with having to deactivate the very national revival they had helped to create against Napoleon. The French, initially led by the Duke of Richelieu as prime minister, were occupied with recovering a place under the sun, with the particularity that at home the restored monarchy found unlikely bedfellows in liberal groups and individuals, especially during Decazes' subsequent tenure, to curb the unreason of the *ultras* (de Waresquiel, 2009). But after the assassination of the Duke of Berry in 1820, a conservative wave brought new French leaders closer in line with their European counterparts' firm commitment against liberalism (Bertier de Sauvigny, 1995, pp. 225-239).

The unity of Europe was a common theme in diplomatic circles, and an asset to be put at the service of dynastic rights and against revolutionaries. In the name of unity, the coalition agreed or acquiesced on repressive measures in Germany (Carlsbad decrees, 1819), and military interventions in Naples and Piedmont (Bertier de Sauvigny, 1959, pp. 160-166; Schroeder, 1984, pp. 606-614). Consensus flickered in 1823, when the French invasion of Spain to restore the king's absolute powers failed to receive the allies' backing. By then, liberal-minded Canning had succeeded Castlereagh at the helm of British Foreign Policy. Tsar Alexander I was assassinated in 1825. In spite of continued ultraconservative leadership in France until the 1830 revolution, the Congress system never recovered from its crisis in the mid-twenties, and with the ideological alignment between the new bourgeois July monarchy in France and Chartist Britain, a new, lasting international divide was born[5].

Contrary to a retroactive myth, the relationship between France and Britain was far from a rosy picture for the remainder of the century. The *doctrinaires* in France had been working for rapprochement[6], but the 1840 brinkmanship regarding Egypt, or the Fashoda incident later in the century (1898) attest to periodic strains (Renouvin, 1955, pp.187s). Nevertheless, the fact remains that throughout the 19th century, behind shifting strategic alliances, two camps with two clearly defined types of legitimacy solidified: the bourgeois-liberal regimes and the traditional monarchies. This dichotomy, which did not dissolve until the aftermath of WWI, prevented any talk of structuring international life alongside stable principles of European unity[7].

The Versailles settlement (1919) clearly stated Germany's responsibility for the war, and its status remained as the enemy to be contained in the immediate post war scenario. At the Locarno Conference in 1925, the winning powers admitted Germany as an equal partner for the first time after the war. The Locarno treaties garnered a Nobel Peace Prize for Britain's Foreign Affairs minister Austen Chamberlain in the same year, and for his French and German counterparts (Aristide Briand and Gustave Stresemann) the year after. The cordial relations between the latter became the basis for a firm association between the cause of peace and the cause of European unity. On the first front, the Briand-Kellogg pact of 1928 outlawed the use of war. On the second front, on 5 September 1929,

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5 France's "English moment" had already been brewing during the Restauration: Waresquiel, 2015.

6 Guizot's narration of the English Revolution became one of the cornerstones of contemporary historiography. See: Lefevre, 1971, pp.178-180.

7 Christopher Clark (2014. p. 65) labels the Austrian Empire at the time of German unification a "neo-absolutist" construct.

Briand laid out in the League of Nations — with Stresemann's agreement — a proposal for the creation of a European Union. That same year, Stresemann asked for the creation of a European currency, and in 1930 Briand submitted his *Memorandum on the Organization of a Regime of European Federal Union* to the Government of France.

The world of finance had played a key role in 1924-1925 in deciding it was time for peace, after a decade of almost uninterrupted violence in many parts of the continent, first with WWI and then with many post-WWI regional conflicts. The Dawes Plan launched by the US in 1924 effectively promoted diplomacy and diplomatic solutions with an eye to financial stability (Tooze, 2015, pp. 452-461). In 1929-1930, the Young Plan meant to continue this trend in the settlement of Germany's war reparations (*ibi*, pp. 488-492). Economic recovery, indirect American backing, and the smooth working of the League of Nations gave a boost to multilateralism where Wilson's fourteen points had fallen short, giving Wilsonian idealism a posthumous albeit temporary victory[8].

Such idealism gave way to several European unity blueprints, but did not yield concrete steps. Throughout the period, pro-European activism flourished—Coudenhove-Kalergi's Pan Europa Movement, created in 1926, had Briand as a president—but did not significantly spread in society. In concluding multilateral agreements, France and Britain often bypassed the League of Nations. The crisis starting in October 1929 helped to resurface old tensions: disagreements were noticeable in the world disarmament conference, with Germany asking for equal treatment, and Britain and the US refusing to guarantee France's security; the Nazi Party rose in Germany; French foreign minister Barthou developed a hostile policy towards Germany. France's pursuit of a *pacte oriental* (1933-1934) failed, and ultimately Paris sealed a bilateral pact with the Soviet Union in 1935 to try to curb Germany's soaring ambitions (Duroselle, 1979, pp. 99-112).

The run-up to WWII was marked by a recomposition of military alliances. Once Germany was defeated, the country's rehabilitation in the international scene happened at a pace marked by the emergence of a new enemy: the Soviet Union. A devastated Europe in the mid-forties saw a resurgence of the European ideal, but a basis for concrete steps was missing altogether, the wounds of the war still wide open. If the idea finally yielded in the early fifties, it was in a different context. The 1948 Congress of Europe in The Hague was opened to

[8] An important number of top positions at the League of Nations were occupied by very young individuals (among them, a thirty-one-year old Monnet as Secretary-General). That made it possible for their careers to extend well beyond the existence of the organizations, opening up new avenues for internationalism: Mazower, 2013, pp. 152-153.

representatives from virtually all of Europe, but some of those from Central Europe barely made it, as the East-West divide was rapidly building. In 1947, European unity was a prospect peace could bring about. By 1951, it had become a need imposed by a new "war": the Cold War[9].

In the late eighties, European Commission President Delors' plan to complete the European Single Market and to create the European Union was met with international momentum: the US and the Soviet Union were thawing relations. The end of the Cold War was promptly followed by the dismantling of the Soviet bloc, and subsequently the demise of the Soviet Union. In 1991-1992, the Maastricht treaty created the European Union. The treaty came into force in 1993, and by the end of the same year, in the Copenhagen summit, EU leaders promised Central and East European countries future accession. Together with the progressive introduction of the single currency, eastward enlargement became a formidable engine infusing energy to the whole of the ever-expanding EU bureaucratic machinery. Decades-old debates that opposed advocates of deepening European integration and advocates of widening the Community/Union's geographical scope were halted: deepening was put at the service of widening, and vice-versa. The euro could deliver on narratives linking individual success to the success of the European project; the enlargement process could tell the tale of two halves of a continent reconciled. As Allied and Russian troops withdrew from Berlin in 1994, such an era of reconciliation seemed to dawn.

The new Europe seemed not only to be drifting away from the former logic of two superpowers, but also from the surveillance of the new hyperpower, the US. To many, Europe appeared to be emerging as a benign world power in its own right. Internally, the second half of the nineties became more a period of placid institutional bonanza than of farsighted political engineering. From the start the blurry contours — both figuratively and literally — of a political entity of unprecedented nature such as the European Union posed problems to the Union's intended all-encompassing storytelling. How to deal with Russia? The country was certainly too big to be called into the "European family" and the West as a whole was more inclined to leave Russia in a limbo of expiating past sins than to make an overture for clear post-Cold War reconciliation between equals. NATO's program *Partnership for Peace*, intended to build ties with Russia and with the countries that had been part of the Soviet sphere, attests to the

[9] American backing was essential for the setting in motion of European integration. Whereas US State Secretary Dean Acheson was doubtful concerning the idea of a "United States of Europe", he was ready - like Monnet - to make progress on the basis of open-ended goals: Harper, 1996, pp. 288-289.

secondary role of the former, and to the Western efforts to ease Russian concerns over the latter switching camps. While Russia was absorbed by its own internal transformation, strains were hardly felt. But by the end of the nineties Russian President Yeltsin was adamant in condemning the stance of the US and EU on the Kosovo war. Tensions mounted as NATO expanded in 1999. Putin's successive terms as Russian Prime Minister and President were marked by assertiveness vis-à-vis the European Union and its member states, as well as the distancing of Russian polity from any model of European liberal democracy (Conradi, 2017).

Reflections on the European Dream and on why Europe was destined to lead the 21st century were to be found well into the next decade (Rifkin, 2004; Leonard, 2005). But the representation of a boundless Europe was fatally wounded on 9/11. The new enemy was of a new kind: not a conventional power, but global networks of individuals using unconventional warfare.

The sequence of scenarios we have described started with a fundamental fact: in the quarter of a century before 1815, after centuries of unrivalled functioning in the European international system, dynastic legitimacy had been challenged by revolutionary legitimacy. Post-Napoleonic elites tried to get rid of the challenge by advocating a united Europe based on dynastic rights. Competing sources of legitimacy, though, became recurrent throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (liberal democracies vs. old-school empires; popular democracies vs. representative democracies…). While that was sometimes of little importance in the forming and shifting of strategic alliances, for most of the period covered it did prevent any consideration of continent-wide unity. The only exceptions, in our view, were the rare moments in which peace was ensured by repressing or momentarily overcoming dual legitimacies. Political initiative seemed to stall in those contexts, to the point that they can be seen as wasted opportunities for European unity. European unity ultimately began to unfold in a context of *fear* — not of peace — in the beginning of the fifties. The existence of a *federateur externe* had been essential for Europeans coming together, and that trumps both an easy narrative of a peace-loving Europe and, in more practical terms, the extraction of lessons from the past for a better future. Hence, the importance of a European memory with deep roots to the past and long branches reaching to the outside.

## *3. European Parliament public history initiatives, Europe's past and the world*

The European Parliament's democratic representativeness gives it legitimacy to create an arena for public conversation on the continent's past. The institution

has shown a proactive approach in this respect. In his inaugural speech as new president of the European Parliament, Hans-Geert Pottering[10] announced the creation of a "reservoir" of European memory, a House of European History where public conversation on Europe's past could take place (Sandberg – Riegels Melchior, 2018). To be sure, a similar idea had been put forward in previous years in the form of a *Musée de l'Europe*, centred in Brussels and developed by an association that organized temporary exhibitions (*L'Europe c'est notre histoire*; *L'Amérique, c'est aussi notre histoire*; *Dieu(x), Modes d'emploi*) with the expectation that they would coalesce in due time into something more permanent (Pomian, 2010). The European Parliament set up a Board of Trustees to run the new initiative. An Academic Committee was also set up, first under the presidency of Hans Walter Hütter and later of Włodzimierz Borodziej. In 2010, the direction of the project fell to Taja Vovk van Gaal, who was succeeded by Constanze Itzel in 2017. An Academic Team reuniting a dozen historians from all over Europe worked on content, conceiving displays and obtaining objects.

The building chosen to host the House was the former *clinique dentaire* Georges Eastman, a 1935 work by Swiss architect Michel Polak. Its proximity to the premises of the European Parliament was an asset. The building was fully renovated by keeping the original features as much as possible (Perchoc – Deschamps, 2017). The gap in the original u-shaped structure was filled to obtain a cubic exterior, and two additional floors were added, entirely built with glass and metal. One of the most visible features of the renovated interior is a giant sculpture piercing all floors from top to bottom, symbolizing the apparent cacophony of the voices of history, an impression that is dispelled when different 'branches' stemming from the entangled core spread out through the different floors, displaying legible citations (Van Weyenberg, 2019). These are not only feel-good quotes: Stalin's and Hitler's words coexist with Herodotus' or Eco's.

The different floors take the visitor on a thorough journey through Europe's history[11]. Although the initiative belongs to the European Parliament and the languages employed in the permanent exhibition are those of the member

[10] Pöttering, Hans-Gert. Inaugural address by the President of the European Parliament. Strasbourg, February 13, 2007. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20070213+ITEM-003+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (u.a. 27/01/21).

[11] Committee of Experts of the House of European History. *Conceptual basis for a House of European History*. Brussels, 2008. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf> (u.a. 27/01/21); European Parliament. *Building a House of European History*. Publications Office of the European Union , Luxemburg 2013. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/tenders/2013/20130820b/Annex_I-Building_a_House_of_European_History.pdf> (u.a. 27/01/21); Mork - Christodoulou, 2018, eds.

states, "Europe" here is not "the countries of the European union", but all peoples on the continent. The chronology spans from the revolutions at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries to the present time. On the two first floors, in the area devoted to temporary exhibitions, the choice of the first exhibition was timely, given the expectations of many a visitor to get acquainted with the deeper historical roots of the continent and not just the development of the contemporary era: *InterActions* explored the maze of relations in all domains —commerce, war, diplomacy — that had woven the European fabric across societies through Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Modern Era (Itzel - Christodoulou - Dupont, 2017, eds.).

In the permanent exhibition, a first set of displays allows us to understand why the scarce peaceful moments in the last two centuries failed to deliver unity. Revolutions are the starting point of the chronological displays of the permanent exhibition. The interconnectedness of most revolutionary movements is apparent, as well as the paradoxical association of nascent nationalism with the Europe of the peoples, an idea dear to Mazzini, the champion of Italian unity (Grau Segú, 2019, pp. 131-133). If the Congress system failed to deliver a lasting European unity, and one worthy of the name, it was in great part because the brotherhood among European dynasts was repeatedly pitted against the revolutionary brotherhoods that were progressively extending their bonds all over the continent.

The figure of the artist Antoine Wiertz (1806-1865), who gives his name to the street where the central European Parliament Brussels premises are located, aptly illustrates both the attachment of the Romantic generation to the idea of Europe and its link with more 'universal' causes. The Belgian authorities have ceded the nearby house of the painter to the Parliament, while keeping ownership of the workshop and the collection. Wiertz, with a reputation as a visionary and of insanity, was in contact with better-known figures, such as Victor Hugo (Mutter, 1907, p. 192). His legacy might appear blurred today and his own trajectory erratic, but he was a frontrunner in several respects. In the 1839 illustrated document *Bruxelles capital / Paris Province*, he foresaw the centrality of Brussels, in what might have appeared as a *boutade* at the time. He stood against the death penalty: one of his many big format paintings, *Penseés et visions d'une tête coupé*, attests to his connection to Hugo and to Hugo's *Les dernières vingt-quatre heures d'un condamné à mort*. In 1858, Wiertz wrote to a friend: "Peut-être mon tableau servira-t-il un jour d'argument contre la peine de mort, je le souhaite" (Musée Wiertz, 1867, p. 47). Today, the artist's estate is the location of the European Parliament's Citizens Garden and the artist house will be a venue for events.

A revolution of another kind was unfolding in parallel to political revolutions: the industrial revolution. Prominent among the displays, a life-sized replica of a steam hammer is flanked by paintings representing bourgeois life and the idealization of workers' labour (in spite of the workers' stern faces). The second half of the 19th century saw the apogee of European optimism and a sentiment of superiority vis-à-vis non-European peoples. A showcase delineated according to the features of the Crystal Palace at the 1851 World Fair in London tells us how technical and scientific progress became linked to a justification of colonialism, and how scientific Darwinism lead to a social Darwinism underpinning the "survival of the fittest". Such violence, first exerted mainly overseas, took spread on European soil itself with the 20th century. Right before WWI we observe in Filippo Marinetti an exaltation of hygiene and violence. He was again to play a role in the interwar period, fascism and WWII, which speaks of the conditions for lasting antagonism. A Sarajevo pistol, replica of one of the four that intervened in the assassination of Archduke Franz-Ferdinand, is at the centre stage of this section. As in reality, the pistol pointing towards a wall screen triggers a big crash of violence and suffering. Displays on the evolution of the effects of war, including permanent physical and geopolitical scars, follow.

A moment of optimism ensues at the beginning of the twenties, with unprecedented democratic voting all over the continent: a showcase presents ballot boxes from Portugal, Greece and Finland side by side. Such optimism would dilute little by little as the decade went on. In the early-to-mid thirties, many democratic countries had flipped to the dictatorial camp. Authoritarianism and totalitarianism, while different in nature, together tell a terrible story at the European level: the curtailing of liberty over almost all of the continent.

WWII resulted, and with it the most traumatic event of contemporary history, the Shoah. In the aftermath of the war, healing its wounds was not just about international reconciliation, but also about coming to terms with the violence committed within single countries. The European Parliament has accompanied other institutions in their search for a narrative that connects war and reconciliation, but also avoids overly simplistic views about national identities, victims, and perpetrators. With the participation of the House of European History, in 2014 a Committee of Experts was formed to extend the Memorial d'Alsace-Moselle, adding a new section tentatively called EU-PHORIA. In contrast with the gloomy times presented in the existing permanent exhibition that covers up to the aftermath of WWII, the new section was to convey a message of optimism, connected to European integration. The EP contributed with part of the funding, with the aim of supporting a new narrative not only underlining

the sufferings of war and division — there had been a concentration camp in Schirmeck — but also the central role of Alsace in pan-European reconciliation, including the Mémorial in the EP visitors itinerary. That entailed work to define the milestones relevant to European unity as a whole, but also to keep the local point of view, with emphasis on the *malgré nous* or the *procès de Bordeaux*.

A quick glimpse at the European Parliament Art Collection can help complement our observations about the tortuous association between European unity and peace. The collection comprises a bust of Victor Hugo donated by the French *Assemblée Nationale* and the first manuscript pages of Hugo's speech on the United States of Europe (Tonner-Seychelles, 2019), pronounced at the opening of the Peace Congress in Paris in 1849. It was not until a century later that European unity yielded its first concrete output: the first production of the European Coal and Steel Community, manufactured by the Belval factory in Esch-sur-Alzette (Luxembourg), a painting of which is also part of the collection. Jean Monnet was given an ingot with the inscription "EUROP" on it.

A second set of displays at the House of European History illustrates the relationship of Europe with the values it claims as its own. Before the chronological storytelling, a more conceptual and reflective area introduces the permanent exhibition. The very first section might be surprising: the Myth of Europa. Why such an approach, centred on the classical story of Zeus in the form of a bull kidnapping the Phoenician princess? The evolving artistic representations actually show how every epoch gave to the myth a different meaning, conveying some of the more pressing concerns of the time[12]. The sequence of artworks presented eschews essentialism. It ranges from the hieratic figuration of Archaic Greek sculpture to the roller coaster of the 20th century: a 1917 German medallion depicts "the suicide of Europa"; a 1928 vignette jokes on interwar optimism for a "pan-Europa", on which the satyr Pan playfully chases the Phoenician princess, incongruous with the myth; Post-War II can only be saluted as "Barbaropa"; while another artwork places the scene of the myth on a missile launching pad. The Economist cover features a dismayed princess and a free-range bull to portray "Europe's midlife crisis".

A second introductory section bears the title *Mapping Europe*, and wonders about the limits of "Europe" (via an audiovisual on a round screen at ground level), and about the continent's persistent interconnectedness (via a full-size reproduction of the *Tabula Peutingeriana*).

A third introductory section reflects on European values: actually how old are some of the tenets of Europe's historical *acquis*? It is up to every visitor to

[12] Several of the artworks are loaned from the Roba collection: Roba, 2011.

come up with his/her own answers, through binary associations. Is slavery something definitely belonging to the past or something very much alive, for example in the form of child exploitation? Does the progressive legacy of the French Revolution prevail over the Terror it unleashed[13]? Is democracy something dating back to Pericles' Athens, as the displayed ostracon seems to suggest or, on the contrary, something very recent, as a picture of the first time women could vote in Switzerland (1974) seems to indicate[14]? On the topic of democracy it is important to mention that, in 2011, not long after the beginning of the work to create the HEH, the Parlamentarium was inaugurated. The Parlamentarium mostly presents the origin and evolution of the institution within the wider framework of post-war European politics. Part of the most clearly historical content outside of this main scope is a presentation of banners displaying illustrations of the first claims for democratic experiences across Europe in the middle ages and modern era[15].

Little by little, the Parlamentarium is being 'replicated' in other locations: "Europa experience" centres are created in different European capitals and cities using the technology of the Parlamentarium and a similar narrative. Today, they are to be found in Tallinn, Copenhagen, Ljubljana, and Berlin, and others are on the way. In September 2020, the Bureau approved the European Democracy Label[16], which is intended as a distinction to recognise sites across Europe for their value in the spreading and strengthening of democracy.

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13 For a reassessment of Terror during the French Revolution, see : Jourdan, 2018.

14 Canfora sees democracy as a very recent phenomenon in history, with no continuity back to Ancient times: Canfora, 2008.

15 For an overview on the historical evolution of Parliaments, see: Van Zanden, Jan Luiten, Eltjo Buringh, and Maarten Bosker, 2012; for analysis of historical reivintication of democratic primacy, see: Pušnik, 2009: "The emphasis on the mythologized democratic inauguration of the Slovenian dukes in Karantanija introduces the dichotomy between an ancient Slovenian democracy versus German and Austrian dictatorship" and Seijas Villadangos, 2015; Sen, 1999. Project MUSE, <doi:10.1353/jod.1999.0055>: "The idea of democracy as a universal commitment is quite new, and it is quintessentially a product of the twentieth century. The rebels who forced restraint on the king of England through the Magna Carta saw the need as an entirely local one. In contrast, the American fighters for independence and the revolutionaries in France contributed greatly to an understanding of the need for democracy as a general system. Yet the focus of their practical demands remained quite local—confined, in effect, to the two sides of the North Atlantic, and founded on the special economic, social, and political history of the region.".

16 European Parliament Bureau Minutes of the ordinary meeting of October 5, 2020. PV BUR. 05.10.2020.

### *4. The Jean Monnet House and Europe's journey*

In 2018, the European Parliament took over the management of the Jean Monnet House, which it had owned since the early eighties (it is actually the first building the European Parliament ever owned) (Deschamps, 2019). The management had been hitherto ensured by the Jean Monnet Association. In parallel, the permanent exhibition was renovated, with the addition of interactive stations using the same technology as the Europa experience centres. Mostly on the first floor, those stations show a timeline of Jean Monnet's life and a round table on the impact of his work until today. A space of reflection contains a corner for consulting *My house of European History*, a broad database gathering memories from people across the continent, a mosaic of personal stories that runs parallel to the collective journey.

Jean Monnet, the founding father of Europe, lived in his Houjarray house during the particularly fruitful years from the end of WWII to his death in 1979. Here, Monnet developed his visionary plan to gradually unite Europe, and wrote with his collaborators the Schuman Declaration, the text that would herald the first, decisive step in that direction: the creation of the first European Community. Today, the site of the Jean Monnet House is open to the public as a museum on the life, work and achievements of the Father of Europe. It also hosts regular academic conferences as well as weekly training events for European Parliament officials. The Jean Monnet Academy was created in 2018 to give training to all new EP recruits as well as to organize away days and team-building meetings. The governing bodies of the EP, such as the Bureau, often meet in the Jean Monnet House. On January 31, 2020 the three presidents of the European institutions met at the Jean Monnet House[17], in what was the first meeting of the kind since the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. Also, the Jean Monnet Dialogue promotes reconciliation and democratic best practices among groupings sometimes at loggerheads, as in the case of Ukraine.

The renovated house has also been an ideal location to host the newly created Network of Founding Father Houses, now Network of Great Europeans houses and political foundations, run by the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS). It has been meeting between Brussels and Houjarray (with videoconferencing during Covid), with discussion of best practices and exchange of ideas. The expansion of the network has been compatible with the core

[17] The European Council, 'The three EU presidents meet at the Jean Monnet House to discuss the EU's future'. Press Release. January 30, 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/president/news/2020/01/30/20200130-3-presidents-jean-monnet-house/#> (u.a. 27/01/21).

Founding Father houses working together on more specific common projects, something that became visible around the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. Previously, EPRS had started to produce brief notes both on the main architects of European unity (Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Louise Weiss), and on their houses. EPRS is also sponsoring an academic *History of the European Parliament* (Kaiser, 2018; Schirmann – Wassenberg, 2019), in a similar guise as the *History of the European Commission* (Dumoulin, 2007-14, ed.). The EP Library is planning to turn into a true Library of Europe, with a significant expansion of the Brussels ground floor premises, public access, and the revamping of the Solvay Library, with a lobby that should include exhibition displays about the history of European integration. In recent years, the EP Historical Archives have also been active in setting up exhibitions, for example on the 70th anniversary of Schuman Declaration, on the 30th anniversary of German reunification, and on the 20th anniversary of the Charter on Fundamental Rights. They come out from their archival work niche, displaying documents to the wider public and offering their work to different EP services and European Parliament Liaison Offices (EPLOs) in the different capitals and main cities. Those exhibitions have been brought to the Jean Monnet House.

The combination of all these activities, together with an important array of partnerships, give the site both a significant international visibility and a special presence within the territory where it is located. In order to face Covid, and capitalizing on previous work, the Jean Monnet House has been able to develop an online and extramural strategy. Expanding museum and learning activities beyond the limits of the site becomes an important asset at least on two accounts. First, to extend the understanding of the question at its core: Why did Jean Monnet's work upend history in such a fundamental way? Second, to offer visitors new angles and perspectives on the museum experience, through online tools linked to physical trails spreading across the surrounding area, and even to out-of-area sites with a shared narrative. Consequently, this strategy is conceived as multi-layered one. A first layer includes the site's close vicinity. "Il est essentiel pour l'esprit de commencer sa journée avec de l'espace": Jean Monnet kept the habit of going for long morning walks to organize the ideas he would work on with his collaborators during the rest of the day. The paths he used to take, the places he often passed by, the people he would regularly run into... part of those memories are still alive, and allow to learn more about Monnet by walking on the footsteps of his daily routines. A second layer spreads across the high basin of the Mauldre river, where local and national institutions are planning to create a *Centre d'interpretation de l'architecture et du Patrimoine* (Bissinger – Cazabat – Guiffant – Mangematin, 2019-20). A third

layer will embark the visitor on a series of mid-to-far range tours through the Yvelines department and the city of Paris: the central region of the Yvelines department, where the Jean Monnet House is located, can claim a special importance in shaping two of the most important watersheds of modern European history. In the mid-17th century, the modern state model that was to be replicated worldwide for the next three hundred years was born in Versailles in its pristine form. In the mid-20th century, a successful blueprint for a supranational Europe was born, as an appealing alternative to the state-centric governance that had been leading to endless confrontations. A fourth layer has an international dimension: the international links of the Jean Monnet prioritize cooperation with other Founding Father houses, such as Adenauer's, Schuman's, and De Gasperi.

The history learning trails relating to each layer intend to provide a hands-on experience to students and to the general public. They will enable visitors in general, but especially groups of students, to learn about the main questions of European history by visiting the sites of each period, through a self-guided interactive experience or through a hands-on guided visit. The narrative will not simply sweep through different eras of Europe's history, but will attempt to answer to questions like: What made the endless cycle of a war leading to another war after a brief period of peace inevitable for so long? How did it become possible, in the mid-20th century, to link the European unity project to lasting peace? How much does this European unity owe to the fabric of a maze of social, economic, and cultural exchanges from Antiquity to the Modern era, created on the European continent?

This hands-on approach allows users to study the great trends of the continent's history in the area, from the origin of urban civilization to a united Europe. Beyond the features specific to local history, the area contains historical elements that speak to a European audience in the broadest sense.

The first historical phase to explore will be the formation of complex societies, from Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. The area has a focal point of exceptional importance: the Roman agglomeration of Diodurum (Blin, 2005; Eicher, 2020), a crossroad trade post that came to be the biggest settlement in ancient Ile-de-France. The same roads that brought prosperity to Diodurum are the ones that facilitate pedestrian and bike mobility today across a very well-preserved agricultural area. Since this inland site was accessible from the Atlantic by fluvial navigation, the area was wide open to products and influences from far away, but also to invasions, as it was the case with the Vikings.

The second phase, from the Middle Ages to the mid-Modern Era, illustrate the cycle or alternation between war and peace. The abandonment of Diodurum

in the early Middle Ages, possibly due to constant flooding, led to the creation of different hamlets on the hills around the deserted city. Many of those hamlets still exist today and have a story to tell. A second ring of higher altitude settlements, behind the above-mentioned hamlets, rose to prominence in feudal times. The ebb and flow of war—for centuries the area was a battleground between warlords, normally rallied around either the king of France or the king of England—often gave the area the aspect of a no-man's land. For that same reason, it was the scenario where many Europe-wide dynastic quarrels were ventilated.

The third phase correspond to the birth of the modern State. If the moving of the French court to Versailles in the mid-17th century had many effects, one of them was bridling the unruly nobility. Representatives of the new power — ministers, confidantes and administrators of the absolute monarchy — came onto the scene[18]. The Phélypeaux family, whose members served in the ministerial cabinets of all kings from Louis XIV to Louis XVI, developed a lavish estate around the chateau of Pontchartrain (Chapman - Chapman, 2004.; Chapman, 2001; Haddad, 2010, pp. 218-224; Chapman, 1998; Frostin, 2006), borrowing some features from the chateau of Versailles itself and employing the services of its mastermind André Le Notre (Healey, 1998; Chapman, 2016, 2001). The Pontchartrain family (other name adopted by the Phélypeauxs) gave an important boost to French colonization of the New World – as many toponyms attest still today – as well as to overseas trade, including slave trade. At a time were a national debate rages in France on whether Jean-Baptiste Colbert's statue should be removed from the front of the *Assemblée nationale*, the former estate of the Pontchartrains is an apt location to reflect on the memory of slavery and promote a wider reckoning.

The fourth and last phase will help discover supranational Europe. Since the beginning of the 20th century, proximity to Paris made the area a preferred location for artists, musicians, writers, politicians and entrepreneurs[19]. Among them, Louis Carré left an important landmark, commissioning the construction of the only Alvar Aalto building in France (Alvar Aalto Foundation, 2003). Jean Monnet was among those who chose to settle close enough to Paris, but still benefitting from a haven of calm in the countryside: it was in this rural area increasingly dotted by cosmopolitanism that Jean Monnet conceived his plan for a united Europe, a "leap into the unknown" (Martín de la Torre, 2014), during the spring days of 1950 (Grau Segú, 2020). Monnet's upbringing had taken place in

[18] Père Joseph, Richelieu's ally and confidante born in Tremblay-sur-Mauldre, shares book with Jean Monnet in: Zorgbibe, 2020.

[19] The long list includes Maurice Ravel, Colette and Romy Schneider.

Cognac, within a family of brandy producers and traders for which daily contact with worldwide clients was a more palpable reality than the distant capital of Paris. For young Monnet, it was only natural to think and to act beyond boundaries. At the same time, the Schuman declaration was written in a moment were decolonization had not taken place at its fullest, so the text assumes a special responsibility vis-à-vis vast world areas still controlled by Europeans. Ultimately, the impending loss of most colonial possessions is one of the factors that compelled West European countries to seek greater cohesion at the end of the fifties, and to rally behind two new communities, the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, including a new British interest to join the club. The Schuman Declaration's cornerstone was the word *solidarity*, a term missing in subsequent European integration founding texts. Yet, since European metropolises parted with their old dominions, they have been needing to employ the world solidarity as a main principle in international relations and world governance, not just out of humane concern, but also out of the imperatives of reparation of the colonialism ravages. It is only through the optics of reparation than the solidarity-based memory of European unity can be inscribed to the wider canvas of a world history that still has too many wounds.

## *5. Conclusions*

A solid memory of the foundations and developments of European unity is fundamental on two accounts. First, without such memory, there is no recollection of peace's tortuous path. Second, it is indispensable to make sure European identity grows aware of its indebtedness to, and enmeshment with, the rest of the world.

For most of the last two centuries, European unity blueprints could not take hold, because there was no European *demos* to underpin them. European unity began to unfold in the fifties, but the European *demos* is still in the making. Not surprisingly: consensus has also been hard to come by in national societies: in France, society only rallied behind republican values in 1880s, after one century of unfinished revolution (Furet, 1998)[20]; in Italy probably not until 1948, with the coming into force of the Republican Constitution; in Spain, the motto of *las dos Españas* lives on.

[20] Since the work of Furet itself had a polarizing effect in French academia and society which might attest to a continued rift on views of the past, our point can be sustained tous azimuts on the work of Eugene Weber,1976.

The nascent European *demos* is still split on questions such as the nature of the peace at the end of WWII, or the real or supposed boundaries between European-ness and non-European-ness. Museums are not there to solve extant contradictions in politics and society, but to expose them to those willing to come to terms with history.

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### *7. Curriculum vitae*

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