

REFLECTING REMEMBRANCE

TEACHING HISTORY FOR A COMMON CULTURE OF REMEMBRANCE?

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Background Document

Why this theme?

History is most visible in the public eye when it comes to commemoration sites, days of remembrance and controversies related to how one deals with legacies of memory. States, as well as groups of people, tend to stress the importance of public remembrance as a token of respect to victims, but also as lessons for the future. Yet students also come across the issue of remembrance in “unofficial” surroundings, such as the media, family memory or, as of late, even the European soccer championships, when the German team visits the former concentration camp of Auschwitz.

How are History, Heritage and Citizenship Educators in Europe’s classrooms dealing with this implicit responsibility of educating the history of this “Dark Continent”? How do we respect the pain and victimhood of past experiences, without burdening future generations with obstructive feelings of guilt? What is the role of the State in preserving memory and how has this role changed when different political ideologies are dominant? Students’ skills to recognize analyze and respect different ways of remembrance and finding their own place and identity within the European fabric of different memories is becoming more and more important on their way towards becoming responsible citizens.

EUROCLIO – European Association of History Educators and the VGD – History Teachers Association of Germany, with its affiliate member the VGD-Thuringia – have come together in 2013 to organize a professional development course, entitled “**Reflecting Remembrance, Teaching History for a Common Culture of Remembrance?**” that will contribute to our understanding of the questions above, through a focused-approach on the bridge between theory and practice, between museums and schools, but also between society and the individual citizen.

Who will be organizing this conference?

EUROCLIO, the European Association of History Educators, promotes a responsible and innovative teaching of history based on multi-perspectivity, critical thinking, mutual respect, and the inclusion of controversial issues. The Association advocates a sound use of history and heritage education towards the building and deepening of democratic societies, connecting professionals across boundaries of countries, ethnicities and religions. It seeks to enhance the quality of history and citizenship education through capacity building for educators and producing and implementing innovative teaching tools. EUROCLIO has been able to define and pragmatically refine a methodology building on the practical work it carried out. Its approach is process-orientation centred and believes in reinforcing professional

talents as fundamental resources for innovation and change. In 2012, EUROCLIO represents 77 independent and volunteer History heritage and citizenship Educators' Associations and related Institutes from 49 mostly European countries and reaches out to a network of at least 25.000 history, heritage and citizenship educators. In their daily work they contact up to 5.000.000 students and pupils per year.

The Association works on preventing abuse of history by promoting respect for diversity, human rights, intercultural dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders. It stimulates the transfer of reliable academic historical knowledge and innovative educational theory and inspires methodological discourse to the school and training institute levels, and the development of history and citizenship curricula, teaching tools and assessment procedures. In order to achieve these goals EUROCLIO utilizes knowledge and experience transfer through peer-learning, exchange of expertise and a system of expert, peer and student reviewing.

The German Association of History Teachers boasting around 4000 members serves as an umbrella organization for the 16 *Länder* associations in Germany, of which the Thuringian association is one. It is headed by an executive board, constituted by board members from different federal states, responsible of the day-to-day business of the association, and a federal board representing the different *Länder* associations. Both boards are chaired by the President, currently Dr. Peter Lautzas. VGD sees it as its main task to ensure and further strengthen the decisive role of responsible high quality history education within the set of subjects taught at schools. VGD sees the role of a critical historical consciousness as adamant and pursues the development of this through problem-oriented teaching. The association has developed a set of pan-German educational standards for the learning and teaching of history, strengthening the approach of competency-based lessons.

Why in Germany?

Europe today has no choice but to work together, in order to be relevant in the world and to ensure that future generations continue to live in peace and prosper. It may be a matter of politics, but one can hardly view the process of European Cooperation and Unification without understanding the historical underpinnings. For this reason, we see questions of memory and remembrance come to the surface in times of crisis. Nationalistic stereotypes, for instance in the view of the debt-crisis relations between different countries, are always nearby for popular opinion to use. German Policy-Makers with History Educators meanwhile have been working on several levels to reconcile historical interpretations with nearly all their neighbors, through student-exchanges, teacher-exchanges, official textbook-review commissions, textbook-production commissions, establishment of European Schools and a wide range of Foundations, Projects and Programmes that work for mutual understanding, respect and peace through History Education.

Needless to say, German History, while taught widely in Europe, remains riddles with a multitude of diverging perspectives. Each generation after 1945 has taken different steps in dealing the legacy of the Holocaust, from being distant, to being very engaged, to the growing distance again in the current

generation. Also, the contemporary political-cultural landscape in former-DDR and BRD Federal States has not overcome this past division. The Jewish population in Germany is in a state of cultural renaissance, but with the memory of the Holocaust still generally dominating German policies towards Israel and Jewish citizens.

But also many issues of “German” remembrance are politically-laden in the rest of Europe. Are fallen German soldiers to be commemorated during the National Days of Remembrance in The Netherlands? Are Polish Commemoration Sites able to treat the complex nature of occupation and collaboration in an unbiased way? What is the role of the Nazi German occupation of the Baltic States, which by many was seen as liberation from the Soviet Occupation? And of course in a very general sense, how can the citizens of Europe today learn from History when the terms of reference (i.e. Occupation, Liberation, German, Nazi, Collaborators, etc) remain highly contested in public debated.

The European Parliament has been very active in the last years to put *Active European Remembrance* on the agenda of the European Commission. Thus, under the EU’s Citizenship Programme many projects and organizations have received financial support to discuss debate and reflect on the Dark past of Europe. The reappraisal of Stalinism following the enlargement of the EU with 10 new former Communist Member States has proved a highly interesting issue in this light. How do we deal on a European level with these different pasts? Is it feasible to treat Stalinism and Nazism equally? How does this benefit the development of a future-oriented culture of remembrance? Of course, it comes again that Germany is the perfect place to engage in this debate, and to do it in such a way that we involve History, Heritage and Citizenship Education from a practitioner’s point-of-view, as well as a policy-maker.

Finally, EUROCLIO has been since 1992 making dialogue among History Educators possible, and while being very active across all of Europe, is has not before joined forces with the VGD on this scale, and very much welcomes the opportunity to finally do so. In 2012, the VGD is also celebrating the 100 year anniversary.

What about History education in Germany?

The keyword to understand the educational system in Germany is *educational federalism* (“Bildungsföderalismus”). It means that the federal states, the *Länder*, are responsible of education within their own boundaries. This principle has been laid down in the German *Grundgesetz* representing the constitution. There is, however, a committee that coordinates and streamlines matters of education: the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany. Its decisions must be implemented in the respective legal systems of the *Länder*. In order to make these decisions fit for everyday school life, usually workgroups consisting of representatives of the respective subjects’ teacher associations, school practitioners, teacher trainers and advisers of the different school subjects are formed. Thus the German educational landscape is multifaceted. For the subject of history this means that the point of time that students encounter this subject for the first time may vary from state to state. This ranges from elementary school level to secondary schools, year 7. Moreover, there is a multitude of state-approved text- and sourcebooks for

the schools to choose from. Each state has different types of schools to enrich the traditional German tri-partite school system. So, as a conclusion, one must say that there is no such thing as *the* German history curriculum or *the* German A-level exam.

Why Erfurt?

Erfurt – City of Diversity – is the perfect location to meet each other and to explore this rich theme. Let us mention first of all **Martin Luther**, who in the 16th century lived and preached in the St. Augustine Monastery. The course will in fact be held in this beautiful monastery, between the same walls that once saw this very important figure in European History that demanded change and reflection that later greatly impacted European History.

One of the major towns of Yiddish culture and Jewish Religion, Erfurt has been home for many generations of **Jewish Life**. Tragically, we are also reminded in Erfurt of the rise of national-socialism and the ensuing horror of persecution and extermination. JA Topf & Sons, the main Industrial company that produced the crematoria used in Nazi Germany's extermination camps is located in Erfurt. Also, the Concentration **Camp of Buchenwald** – which enslaved European Jews, Roma, Sinti, Jehova's Witnesses, Homosexuals, but also is known for holding tens of thousands of political prisoners and prisoners of war and deported people from Germany and occupied countries in Europe is nearby.

The rise of **National-Socialism** in general can be approached in particular from the city of Weimar, which is neighboring Erfurt. What patterns in the history of the Interbellum Democratic "Weimar Republic" carry a message for the functioning of Democracy today? In the light of Europe's financial crisis, many have started to compare to the situation across Europe with what the people in the Weimar Republic faced in times of economic crisis, high unemployment rates, political unrest and a multitude of political parties unable to form stable coalitions. Not only for this reason do Weimar times prior to the rise of fascism in Germany present a highly interesting tableau for our international guests. Weimar might be seen as a symbol that encompasses the best and also the worst aspects of German history: Classical times – mainly end 18th century - that brought forth brilliant minds such as Goethe and Schiller and great achievements in the fields of the arts, architecture and literature but in the very same place the concentration camp of Buchenwald representing the darkest chapter of German and European history.

Nearby Erfurt, at Checkpoint Alpha, we approach the History of **Post-War Germany**, which is centered on the American-Soviet confrontation. This commemoration site has proved a valuable conference partner, as it not only represents yet another facet of a certain culture of remembrance, presenting a very lively image of what life was like during the Cold War, it is also very active in teacher in-service training, as a place for student exchanges, school projects and other features of active learning. It has often been labeled "the hottest spot in the Cold War" because politicians saw it as the most dangerous place of direct confrontation and thus the point at which a military conflict was most likely. Today, Point Alpha Foundation is an active member of the International Council of Museums and has been awarded the European Heritage Label. However, Erfurt's culture and citizens are also living testimonies to the so-called **Intra-German History** as they lived in the DDR, and experienced the vast changes after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Unification of Germany.

Erfurt, the capital of the Federal State of Thuringia, houses a stunning array of medieval and renaissance architecture, visible in the many streets, the many churches and synagogues, including the skyline-defining Dom-Cathedral with our venue located in the heart of the old town.

Participants will enjoy one of the most beautiful historical town centres of Germany. 9000 academic students studying at Erfurt University bridge the picturesque past and Erfurt's lively present in the little alleys between the old merchants' bridge and the cathedral. This town, located in the heart of Europe, used to be a thriving commercial centre, profiting from its location close to medieval trading routes. Augustinerkloster, our charming conference venue, actually saw Martin Luther who lived there as a monk.

Based on its rich "Medieval Jewish arts and culture" heritage, Erfurt is currently running for the UNESCO world heritage label for 2017. The old synagogue, Jewish cemetery, the Jewish silver treasure and the Mikve are precious witnesses of the town's Jewish past.

The course is embedded in the 20th EUROCLIO Annual Conference, which aims to bring together around 120 History Educators from all of Europe and beyond for a rich and active programme of 6 days, filled with debates, discussions, presentations, workshops, on-site study visits to commemoration sites, schools and educational establishments, city tours and receptions and a social-cultural programme that connects colleagues internationally in a fun and friendly way. The overall topic is going to be approached on different levels based on two concrete examples from history. We offer a groundbreaking platform for History Educators from across Europe to think together, and let themselves engage vividly in big questions:

- In what ways are the enriching aspects of Jewish life and culture in European history remembered (using the example of Erfurt)?
- What does this mean for today's multicultural societies, who welcoming back people of Jewish belief, and also deal with living together in diversity with people of many different backgrounds in a peaceful and trusting interaction in society?
- How are the Second World War and the Holocaust remembered on Germany and other countries (using the example of Buchenwald commemoration site) and how does that affect today's students?
- How is the intra-German history remembered in eastern and western German federal states and what does this mean for history education in both parts of our country?
- From all of the above, and considering the many parallels with other countries that have faced/are still facing division, can we distil lessons learned for a common culture of remembrance?

EUROCLIO and the VGD greatly look forward to taking these matters in a hands-on fashion, not letting ourselves get caught in webs of politicized debate, but freely engaging each other as History, Heritage and Citizenship Education Professionals with a keen eye on progress.