



HOUSE OF
EUROPEAN
HISTORY



An initiative of the European Parliament

THE HOUSE OF EUROPEAN HISTORY – FACTS AND FIGURES



Content: European history, mainly of the 19th and 20th century, with a specific focus on European integration and with retrospective insights and thematic close-ups on processes and events from earlier centuries.

Public opening: 6 May 2017

Historical approach: The House of European History aims to convey a transnational overview of European history, taking account of its diversity and its many interpretations and perceptions. The House seeks to contribute to the understanding of European history, including the wider global context, and to stimulate debate about Europe and the European integration process. The main focus of the permanent exhibition is on European history of the 19th and 20th century and the history of European integration, viewed from a broad historical perspective and bringing together both contrasting and shared experiences of Europeans in history.

Objectives: The House of European History aims to become the leading museum about transnational phenomena which have shaped our continent. By interpreting history from a European perspective, it connects and compares shared experiences and their diverse interpretations. It aims to initiate learning on transnational perspectives across Europe.

Location: Eastman Building in Parc Léopold, at the heart of the Brussels “European district”. The building was converted and enlarged by the international consortium *Atelier d’architecture Chaix & Morel & associés* (FR), *JSWD Architekten* (DE), and *TPF* (BE). The design company for the permanent exhibition is *Acciona Producciones y Diseño* (ESP) and the production company is *Meyvaert Glass Engineering* (BE).

Languages: The permanent exhibition is available in 24 languages and the rest of the visitor offer in at least 4 languages.

Opening hours and conditions: Opening 7 days per week, from 10:00–18:00 except for Monday, 13:00–18:00. Free Admission. Closed on the following dates: 1 January, 1 May, 1 November, 24, 25, 31 December.

Visitor facilities: Restaurant, shop, auditorium, learning rooms.

What it offers: A permanent exhibition with a presentation of exhibits which have been brought together from around 200 museums and collections from across Europe and beyond; temporary exhibitions; educational programmes; events for local and visiting publics; publications and a range of online information.

Target groups: Anyone interested in Europe and its history; no special knowledge required. Special information products have been developed for specific target groups, such as young people, families and schools.

Exhibition area: 4000 m² for the permanent exhibition, 500 m² for temporary exhibitions.

Permanent exhibition: The permanent exhibition presents European political, economic, social and cultural history in a chronological layout, but with a thematic approach within this structure. Its principal focus is on European history of the 19th and 20th century, with retrospective insights into processes and events from earlier centuries which were important for the development of the continent. A particular focus is on the history of European integration.

Temporary exhibition: The House of European History programme also includes a yearly temporary exhibition that provides the opportunity to expand upon or extend the themes and periods from the permanent exhibition. This allows for different or innovative types of exhibitions and varied content, in ways that are attractive to different audiences. As with the permanent exhibition, these temporary exhibitions take a transnational and interdisciplinary approach.

Visitor experience: Visitors can explore European history at their own pace and level, and branch off to further investigate a theme that especially interests them. The broadest possible range of modern museological tools and methods has been adopted, using for instance a layered presentation of contents, which allows visits on different levels and rhythms. The visitor experience is varied by changing moods and spatial typologies and by varying densities of objects and of interactive features. Recurring elements such as landmarks link the exhibition topics.

Costs: The project development costs amounted to approximately €55.4 million. This covers the conversion, extension and renovation of the building as well as the development and installation of the permanent exhibition and the first temporary exhibition, including the start of the build-up of a museum collection.

Staff: An interdisciplinary Academic Project Team, (composed of historians, museologists, learning specialists and administrators from 18 different Member States) developed the content of the exhibition. For the architectural and infrastructural development, an interdisciplinary team oversaw all the building and development work.

Funding: The development costs were borne by the European Parliament

Governing bodies: A Board of Trustees and an Academic Committee respectively supervise and advise on the project.

The Board of Trustees: Supervises and takes decisions on fundamental matters relating to the project. It is chaired by former President of the European Parliament Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering.

The Academic Committee: Chaired by historian Prof. Dr. Oliver Rathkolb and made up of university professors and experts from internationally-renowned museums, it advises the HEH Academic Project Team on all historical and museological issues.

Q&A about the project

Why set up a House of European History?

The decades-long process that has created the European Union has had a profound impact on the way European countries organise and govern themselves, but until now there has been no museum which places this process within a wider historical context, bringing together and juxtaposing the contrasting experiences of different European countries and peoples.

The generation of people who experienced the tragedies of the 20th century and went on to build the European Communities is disappearing. Now is the time, therefore, to present the development of European integration in a comprehensible way for a broader public. Also, to explain its main historical developments, motivating forces and aims, so as to enable future generations to understand how and why today's Union developed as and when it did. In times of crisis, it is particularly important to develop and sharpen consciousness of cultural heritage and to remember that peaceful cooperation cannot be taken for granted.

The European Parliament has therefore set up the House of European History, which will give citizens an opportunity to reflect on this historical process and on what it means for the present. Parliament believes that the museum can be a place of debate and understanding about contemporary situations from the perspective of their historical roots and in the light of historical experiences.

What is the mission statement of the House of European History?

The House of European History is a forum for learning, reflection and debate, open to audiences from all generations and backgrounds. Our primary mission is to enhance understanding of European history in all its complexity, to encourage the exchange of ideas and to question assumptions.

The House presents Europe's history in a way that raises awareness about the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations. It preserves shared and dividing memories. It exhibits and collects the history of European integration and its foundations. A project of the European Parliament and part of its visitor offer, the House of European History is academically independent.

Our transnational collection, our exhibitions and our programmes provide unexpected and inspiring experiences. Through outreach and partnerships, we aim to strengthen the European dimension in debating, exhibiting and learning about history. A place for encounters and exchange, the House's multi-faceted interpretation of the past builds bridges to questions relevant for today's Europe.

What are the principles governing the project?

From the outset, the project has been driven by a desire to promote knowledge of Europe's history and to raise awareness of the diversity of memories within Europe in an open and inspiring fashion. The academic independence and international composition of the project team were preconditions and a team of historians and museum professionals from all over Europe were recruited specifically for the project. They have worked to develop the exhibitions, ensuring that the diversity of European history – and of its interpretations – is fairly represented.

A high-level advisory board (Academic Committee) composed of internationally renowned historians and museologists ensures the academic accuracy and relevance of the content of the exhibitions.

Where is it?

The House of European History is located in the Eastman building in Parc Léopold, close to the European institutions. The Eastman building was built in 1935 to house a dental clinic for disadvantaged children, financed by a donation from the US businessman George Eastman, the inventor of the Kodak camera. With a view to transforming this building into a building for exhibition purposes, an architectural competition was held, which was won by a group composed of the architects Chaix & Morel et associés from France, JSWD Architekten from Germany, and TPF from Belgium. Their plans included the renovation of the façades – maintaining the historic aesthetic of the building – as well as adding a modern extension in the original building's courtyard and on its roof.

How did the project develop?

The project to create a House of European History was initiated by the then European Parliament President, Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, in his inaugural speech of 2007. The following year, a committee of distinguished historians and museum experts from various European countries drew up a first concept for the project, entitled the "Conceptual Basis for a House of European History", which envisaged the House of European History as a modern exhibition, documentation and information centre that would reflect the latest in museological thinking.

From January 2011 onwards, an Academic Project Team was recruited. This team, brought together from across Europe, then progressively defined the vision and mission of the new museum, developed the narrative for the permanent exhibition and worked on different fields such as visitor policy, temporary exhibition and collecting policies. The Academic Committee advised the team in this work and agreed on the result. Parliament's Bureau (President and 14 Vice-Presidents) approved all major decisions.

What story does the museum tell?

The permanent exhibition concentrates on the main phenomena and processes which have shaped contemporary Europe throughout history, and emphasises the diversity of experience, awareness and interpretation related to these developments.

It does not portray the individual histories of Europe's states and regions. Instead, it focuses on European phenomena. The Academic Project Team chose three criteria: the event or idea originated in Europe, expanded across Europe and continues to be relevant today. Based on these criteria, the project team distilled six themes with a large number of topics and sub-topics. Here and there, the permanent exhibition goes beyond the outer borders of the European Union.

European history might be complex, diverse and fragmented, but it has a large number of wideranging commonalities and widely-shared experiences; displaying some of these is the purpose of the permanent exhibition. Beginning with the ancient myth of "Europa and the Bull" and its changing interpretations, the exhibition highlights key factors of Europe's heritage, which have shaped it deeply, with effects that are still visible today.

Does the House of European History aim to create a European identity?

The notion of identity is one of the most debated in the field of cultural studies. In association with the activities of museums, it has given rise to a vast ensemble of literature and reflection. There is no commonly agreed definition of what a European identity could be. The term is too reductionist and too static to be used as a basis for the House of European History.

If the House were to propose a pre-defined concept of European identity this would only hamper debate, rather than creating a many-voiced discussion on this highly interesting and topical question. Instead of giving fixed answers, the House of European History wants to stimulate public discussion of European memory and consciousness.

Will the House of European History replace national histories?

The House of European History is not a simple sum of national histories, nor does it seek to replace them. The House of European History provides a reservoir for European memories, containing experiences and interpretations in all their diversity, contrasts and contradictions. Its presentation of history is complex rather than uniform, more differentiated than homogeneous, critical rather than affirmative.

At what point does the narrative start?

The permanent exhibition in the House of European History, the centrepiece of the new museum, focuses on European history from the 19th century to the present day. In some parts, the presentation goes further back in history, reaching back to ancient times and the Middle Ages, in order to explain fundamental characteristics of European culture and civilisation, thus enabling visitors to gain a better understanding of the present.

The permanent exhibition starts with a presentation of the myth of Europa, the change of geographical concepts throughout history and a reflection on what European heritage might be. The exhibition concentrates on the European history of the 19th and 20th centuries, with a special focus on the history of European integration.



HOUSE OF
EUROPEAN
HISTORY



An initiative of the European Parliament