



THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN HISTORY EDUCATION



History Symposium Report
General State Archives of Greece,
Athens, 19-20 June 2026



**OBSERVATORY
ON HISTORY TEACHING
IN EUROPE**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

French edition: La dimension européenne
dans l'enseignement de l'histoire

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History Symposium Report
General State Archives of Greece,
Athens, 19-20 June 2026

RAPPORTEUR:

BIRTE WASSENBERG,
Professor of Contemporary History, Sciences Po Strasbourg



EVENT ORGANISED IN CO-OPERATION WITH:



General State
Archives of Greece



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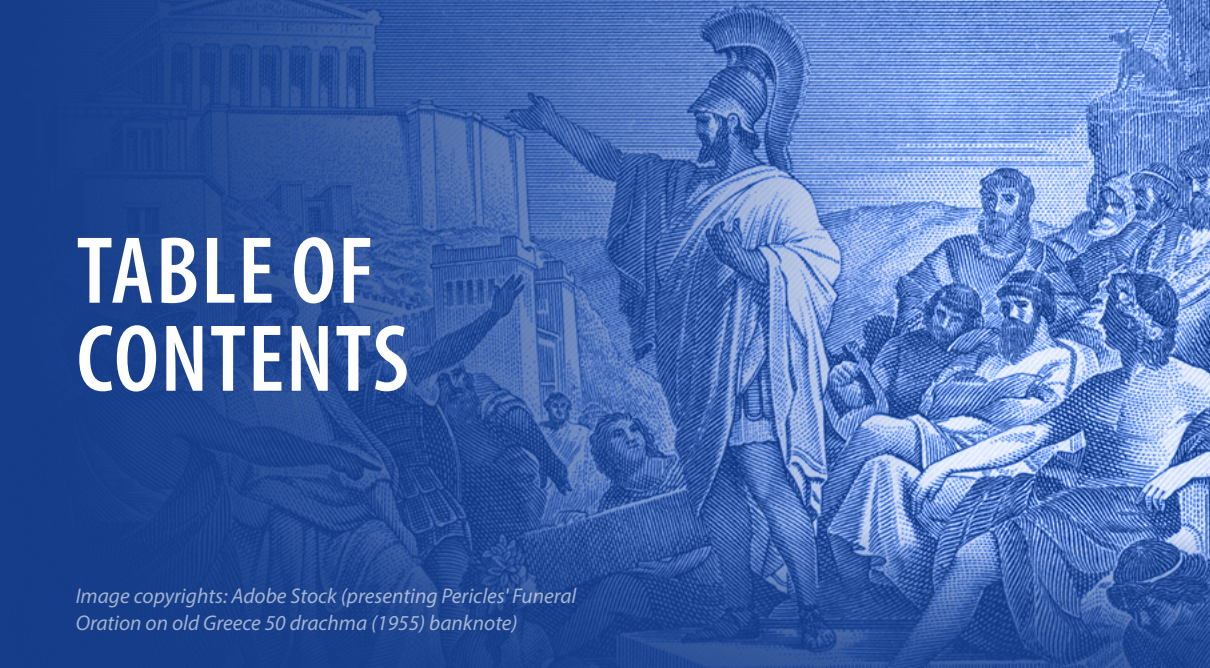


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Foreword

Across Europe, questions of identity, memory and national belonging are increasingly at the centre of public debate. On the one hand, they can be instrumentalised to fuel geopolitical tensions, democratic backsliding and societal polarisation. On the other, they can provide valuable opportunities to strengthen mutual understanding, collaboration and democratic resilience.

In this context, history education carries a particular responsibility. It equips learners not only with knowledge of the past, but also with the ability to critically examine historical narratives, understand complexity and engage constructively with diverse perspectives.

Since its foundation, the Council of Europe has recognised history education as a cornerstone of democratic culture. Through the 1954 European Cultural Convention and decades of intergovernmental co-operation, it has consistently promoted an approach based on critical thinking, multiperspectivity, respect for human dignity and dialogue across borders. These principles remain as relevant today as ever.

The European dimension in history teaching is a key expression of this vision. It encourages learners to connect national histories with broader historical contexts and to build an awareness of both shared experiences and Europe's rich diversity. Europe cannot be understood through either a single historical narrative or a collection of isolated national histories. Recognising the interconnected processes that have shaped our continent is therefore essential to appreciating both what unites us and what makes our histories distinct.

The symposium **“The European Dimension in National Systems”**, organised in Athens by the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, the General State Archives of Greece and the Institute of Educational Policy under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports of Greece in **June 2026**, provided a platform to explore these questions. The event brought together representatives of the Observatory's member states, its Scientific Advisory Council, and researchers and practitioners from Greece. Discussions highlighted the richness and diversity of national approaches to history teaching, while confirming that European and national perspectives are not competing frameworks but complementary ways of understanding the past.

These exchanges also demonstrated the value of professional collaboration in addressing common educational challenges. While curricula remain a national responsibility, the quality of history teaching is strengthened through the sharing of experiences, the comparison of approaches and engagement with different historical perspectives. The symposium also reaffirmed the central role of teachers.

In an increasingly complex information environment, they help learners navigate contested interpretations of the past and equip young people with the critical thinking skills essential to democratic citizenship. Supporting educators through research, professional exchange and international co-operation therefore remains both relevant and urgent.

We hope this report will contribute to these ongoing reflections. At a time when simplistic or manipulated interpretations of history increasingly fuel division, strengthening the European dimension in history teaching is not about promoting a single authoritative narrative. It is about helping future generations understand Europe's complex past, appreciate the diversity of historical experiences, and develop the democratic competences needed to meet the challenges of the future.



PROF. DIMITRIS P. SOTIROPOULOS,

Chair of the OSTE Governing Board, Professor of Contemporary History, University of Peloponnese, President of the General State Archives of Greece



VILLANO QIRIAZI,

Head of the Education Department of the Council of Europe

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INTRODUCTION



Introduction

The symposium **“The European Dimension in National Systems”** was held on **19 and 20 June 2026** at the **General State Archives of Greece in Athens**. It was organised in the framework of the Council of Europe’s Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTe), with the support of the Greek authorities, at a time when the place of Europe in school history classes remains uneven across its member states. Indeed, only a limited number of countries explicitly include the European dimension in their history curricula, even though teachers consider it highly important according to the first OHTe general report on the state of history teaching in Europe (2023).



This symposium aimed to provide an opportunity for reflecting on how Europe is defined, taught and experienced in history education.

The stakes were therefore both academic and political. At the academic level, the symposium raised the following question: **what does it mean to teach “Europe” in history?** Europe can be approached as a geographical space, a cultural construction, a political project, a legal community, or a field of shared and conflicting memories. As Professor **Birte Wassenberg**’s keynote showed, even defining Europe is not simple, since geographical, cultural and political criteria do not fully overlap.

The symposium also addressed an important historiographical issue. **Teaching European integration does not simply mean adding a few chapters on European institutions to national history courses.** It raises broader questions about chronology, scale and narrative: **when does the European construction process begin, which actors should be included, and how can Europe be taught without neglecting its diversity?** In this sense, the symposium questioned not only the content of curricula, but also the way history itself is framed and organised in schools.

At the same time, the symposium showed that **history teaching is closely linked to present-day political and societal concerns.** Several speakers stressed that today’s challenges are often transnational: war, migration, democratic backsliding, fake news, artificial intelligence and geopolitical tensions do not stop at national borders. For Professor **Dimitris P. Sotiropoulos**, Chair of the OHTe Governing Board, this is precisely why history teaching cannot remain locked within a purely national

frame, even if national narratives still matter. The point is not to erase national histories, but to equip students with tools for understanding how national experiences are connected to wider European and global developments.

Indeed, the importance of teaching history was a central theme throughout the symposium. History was presented not as a passive knowledge of the past, but as a way to train judgement, critical thinking and civic awareness. In the welcoming addresses, history teaching was described as a means of preparing young people to face complex issues such as conflict, inequality, populism, and the political uses of memory. In light of these challenges, history is a resource for understanding the present and acting in the future.

Another major point of interest concerned democracy. As highlighted by **Villano Qiriaz**, Head of the Education Department of the Council of Europe, **the role of history education is not to impose a single narrative, but to encourage dialogue across borders and to promote multiperspectivity**. This point is crucial, because the way Europe is taught can shape how young people understand

difference, belonging and intercultural co-existence.

The symposium also made clear that the European dimension remains difficult to implement in practice. Curricula are often overloaded, textbooks remain national in focus, and teachers do not always have the time to connect national, European and global levels. In some cases, Europe appears as a central framework; in others, it remains only secondary with regard to national issues.

For all these reasons, the Athens symposium was a broader reflection on how Europe is imagined and transmitted through history teaching, and on what this means for the future of democracy on the European continent. By bringing together policymakers, scholars and practitioners, it created a space to compare national experiences, identify tensions and think about how history teaching can remain rigorous, plural and meaningful in the face of current European challenges.





WHAT HISTORY FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION?



History Symposium

**THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION
IN NATIONAL SYSTEMS**

10-12 June 2006

What history for European integration?

Keynote by **Birte Wassenberg**,
Professor of Contemporary History, Sciences Po Strasbourg



Birte Wassenberg's keynote established the conceptual framework for the whole symposium. Her main question was simple but fundamental: ***what do we mean when we speak about the history of European integration and how should this be taught in schools?*** She argued that Europe should not be treated as a fixed and obvious object, because even its definition remains open to debate.

She began by addressing the problem of delimiting Europe. A geographical definition is not fully satisfactory, because Europe has no clear "natural" border to the East. A cultural definition is also problematic, since cultures overlap, change over time, and cannot be separated by rigid dividing lines. A political definition may seem more useful, especially if Europe is linked to the fundamental values protected by the Council of Europe – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – yet even this remains unstable because these values are constantly reinterpreted in practice. As her remarks suggested, the issue is not only where Europe is situated, but also on what basis inclusion and exclusion are decided.

Wassenberg then moved to a second question: when did European integration begin? In her view, to understand the process of European unification properly, one must return at least to the interwar period, when many projects, ideas

and models of European co-operation were already being discussed. She referred to figures and initiatives such as Coudenhove-Kalergi's concept of "Pan-Europa", Aristide Briand's idea of a European federal union, and many other interwar concepts of cultural, economic and political co-operation.

From this perspective, the keynote underlined that post-war European integration should be seen as the implementation of earlier ideas on how to unify Europe, but under new political conditions. After 1945, several European organisations were set up, including the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), the Council of Europe, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). These organisations did not all cover the same geographical space, nor did they pursue the same method or the same purpose of European co-operation. This was an important part of her argument: European integration was never a single path, and it cannot be reduced to one institutional framework.

This led to one of the keynote's central ideas, namely that Europe does not equal the European Union (EU). Wassenberg insisted on the distinction between what might be called a "Greater Europe" (which refers to



the 46 member states of the Council of Europe) and a "Smaller Europe" (which refers to the 27 member states of the EU). In other words, the EU is only one part of a wider European architecture that also includes the Council of Europe and other European organisations. This distinction matters for teaching, because a narrow EU-centred approach risks giving students a simplified and incomplete image of Europe.

Wassenberg then turned to the teaching of Europe in school curricula. Drawing on analysis of curricula, Eurydice reports, Council of Europe publications, and textbook studies across fourteen European countries, she argued that there is no single way of teaching Europe. National curricula offer very different narratives, shaped by specific political histories, collective memories and geopolitical positions. The European dimension taught in schools is therefore fragmented not only in content, but also in the place given to the very idea of a shared European history.

A key finding of the presentation was the contrast between different regional patterns. In many Western European cases, Europe is presented as a shared heritage and a peace-building process. France and Germany, for example, often place European integration at the centre of the historical narrative, with strong emphasis on reconciliation and the Franco-German relationship. Spain and Italy also integrate Europe into national history by presenting democratisation and post-war reconstruction as part of a broader European integration narrative. By contrast, Northern, Eastern and Balkan states tend to frame Europe differently. In Nordic countries, Europe is presented less as a given reality and more as an object of debate, linked to neutrality, referendums and political choice. In parts of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, national rebirth, sovereignty, unresolved conflict and historical grievances often remain more central than the process of European integration. In such cases, Europe may appear as secondary, external, incomplete or even worrying.

Therefore, teaching European integration cannot simply mean recounting the history of the EU and post-1950 European institutions. Such an approach omits layers of complex processes, such as the circulation of ideas, legal developments, diplomatic frameworks, wartime experiences, and forms of co-existence that paved the way for later integration. The real question is therefore not only how to teach European integration, but also what “Europe” itself means when it becomes a school subject.

Wassenberg argued that Europe should be taught at several scales: that of the EU, of the Council of Europe, but also of the continent as a whole, encompassing its nations, border regions and transnational contact zones. This multi-scalar approach avoids reducing Europe to a single political framework. It helps students understand that Europe is made

of overlapping institutions, timelines and spaces. She also warned against a teleological reading of history. Europe should not be taught as if unity had always been the natural end point of the continent’s past. Such a narrative obscures conflict, failure, resistance and alternative paths. Wassenberg instead maintained that colonialism, decolonisation wars, Euroscepticism, border tensions and unresolved memory conflicts must remain part of the European narrative. Europe, in her view, should be taught through both its successes and its failures.

The final part of the keynote linked these questions to current geopolitical challenges. Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, migration pressures, enlargement fatigue, democratic backsliding and digital misinformation all make the teaching of a shared European history more necessary than ever. In this context, schools have a strategic role because they develop the skills of interpretation, comparison and judgement that future citizens will need.

No single way to narrate Europe

09

What matters is to acknowledge that European construction is a regional integration process embedded in values, institutions, crises, resistances and diversity. Europe should therefore be approached from school onward not through one exclusive EU narrative, but through multiple scales, multiple organizations and multiple historical experiences.

Plural Chronologies

Plural Europes

Plural Pedagogies



THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN NATIONAL SYSTEMS

Symposium

THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION
IN NATIONAL SYSTEMS

2026

Greece

The European dimension in national systems

Following the keynote address, the symposium explored how the European dimension is reflected in national systems of history education. Through **three roundtables** and **one project presentation**, participants examined how Europe is represented in curricula, how teachers work

with it in practice, and how national narratives can be connected to broader European perspectives. Building on the keynote address, which considered what kind of history of Europe should be taught, these sessions focused on how the European dimension is translated into curricula and educational practice.

1

What is Europe in national history curricula?



2

What is Europe for history teachers?



3

National narratives and the European dimension



Youth, Europe and History



1

What is Europe in national history curricula?

The first roundtable focused on the place of Europe in national history curricula across different education systems. Its aim was to compare how European themes appear in school programmes, how they are framed and how they relate to national history. The session brought together perspectives from France, Greece, Montenegro and Slovakia.

A first important finding that emerged from the discussion was that **Europe is present in national curricula in very uneven ways. In some cases, it appears as a clear and structured theme; in others, it is more fragmented, indirectly dealt with, or even marginal.** The roundtable showed that this difference does not only concern the respective weight of Europe in the curriculum, but also how Europe is defined: as heritage, as institutions, as values, as political history or as a source of tension.

THE FRENCH CASE

presented by **Jérôme Grondeux**,
*historian, Inspector General for
National Education and member of
the OSTE Governing Board*



The French case showed a relatively strong presence of Europe in history school curricula. History is taught at all levels in France and

remains closely linked to geography and often moral and civic education. **Europe is evoked in several parts of the curriculum: common heritage, shared values, European integration, and institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights.** Europe is also approached through questions of borders, geopolitics, diplomacy, war and peace. This makes it possible to teach both political history and critical reflection, especially concerning the difference between facts and their interpretation. At the same time, the French example showed some limits. Teaching Europe raises difficult questions about identity, the relation between the local and the global scale and the place of legal instruction in school education.

It was noted that the rule of law is an important European principle, yet it is not always easy to teach because it requires an understanding of concepts and instruments that go beyond traditional history lessons. There was also a call for stronger links with other disciplines, since history alone cannot carry the full burden of teaching Europe in school.



THE SLOVAK CASE

introduced by **Mária Harmaňošová**,
representing the National Institute
of Education and Youth and member
of the OHTE Governing Board



The Slovak case pointed to a system in transition. Two curricula currently co-exist, one older and one revised, with the newer one giving more attention to Europe than the previous one. History is mandatory from grade 5 of basic education to the third year of *gymnasium*,¹ and the revised curriculum places stronger emphasis on shared challenges, migration and multiple levels of identity, from the local to the national and European levels.

An important point was that the new approach is not only about the content of the European dimension in history, but also about skills. This suggests a move towards a more reflective and competence-based way of teaching and learning history, as opposed to an approach focused purely on facts and content.



THE GREEK CASE

presented by **Angelos Palikidis**,
Professor of History Didactics at the
Democritus University of Thrace

The Greek case highlighted more structural difficulties. Professor Palikidis described the education system as highly textbook-centred, with strong emphasis on memorisation and assessment based on content reproduction. Another issue raised was that history is not always taught by specialists trained in the discipline, since teachers from other backgrounds may also teach history classes. This weakens the place of didactics and limits the development of critical approaches. The discussion on Greece also stressed the weight of national narratives, corresponding with the finding of the first OHTE general report (2023) that two out of three history teachers in Greece find national history to be a very relevant or the most relevant geographical scale. Moreover, the teaching of history still follows a strong linear model, structured around Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the modern era. Europe appears mainly through the role of ancient Greek heritage, the Renaissance, the struggle for independence, and EU accession.

Yet the system faces two major constraints: overloaded curricula and lack of time, issues similarly highlighted in the OHTE general report. As a result, many teachers never reach the most recent periods, even if they are included in textbooks, and topics linked to present-day Europe are often omitted altogether.



1. This generally corresponds to ages 11 to 18. See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/observatory-history-teaching/slovak-republic>, accessed 10 August 2026.



THE MONTENEGRIN CASE

presented by **Jelena Vlaović**,
history teacher



The example of Montenegro demonstrated both openness and constraint. On the one hand, the curriculum seeks to adopt European values and methods promoted by the Council of Europe, including multiperspectivity, critical thinking and attention to common heritage. The Byzantine and Ottoman pasts, for example, can be used to highlight shared histories rather than isolated national narratives. On the other hand, the discussion underlined the heavy pressure of political sensitivities in the Balkans. Overloaded curricula, politicisation and avoidance of sensitive issues – like the Yugoslav Wars – make it difficult to teach Europe in a neutral and open way. This case study therefore reflects more fundamental regional divisions.

Beyond the situation in different countries, the debate also raised broader conceptual

questions. One participant asked whether European curricula risk placing too much emphasis on Europe itself, while leaving too little space for the rest of the world, especially Africa, Asia and the Americas. This was an important reminder that teaching the European dimension should not produce a closed European “bubble”. Another question was raised about the Balkans and the difficulty of addressing political tensions linked to the Yugoslav Wars. These issues are visible even in vocabulary choices, where words such as “unification” or “annexation” can shape the meaning of the lesson and affect the emotional climate in the classroom. A final issue concerned how Europeans see one another and how Europe is seen from outside Europe. The discussion pointed to colonialism and to the importance of including non-European viewpoints in the reflection on Europe. This widened the roundtable beyond the issue of curriculum design and suggested that teaching Europe also requires self-criticism.

The roundtable therefore confirmed one of the keynote’s central ideas: Europe is taught in many different ways, and this diversity reflects both the richness and the tensions of the European continent itself.



2

What is Europe for history teachers?

The second roundtable moved from curricula to classroom practice. This refers to how teachers apply curricula: selecting examples, structuring lessons, explaining difficult topics, and deciding how to connect national, European and global histories. The central question of this session was not only how Europe is represented in official curricula, but what Europe becomes when teachers actually teach it.

The roundtable explored how teachers understand the European dimension and how this affects their choices in the classroom. It also examined how they move between national frameworks and broader European or global perspectives. The speakers came from different national backgrounds in **Armenia, Greece, and Ireland** as well as **EuroClio – European Association of History Educators**, lending the discussion both a practical and a comparative character.

Andreas Holtberget,
project manager at EuroClio



A first point that emerged from the presentations was that teachers often work across several scales. **Andreas Holtberget** stressed the **value of pan-European co-operation between historians and educators**. EuroClio, created in the 1990s at the initiative of the Council of Europe, has long worked to make European history teaching more connected through publications, seminars and conferences. The intervention suggested that teaching Europe is not new, but part of a longer effort to build networks across borders. Holtberget also raised a key didactic question: **should European history be taught in a uniform way or should different national chronologies remain visible?** He gave the example of the Second World War, noting that in Norway, the war is often said to begin in 1940, while on a wider European scale it clearly started earlier. This example reveals



a broader issue: a European perspective does not necessarily mean erasing national perspectives. It may instead require showing how the same event can be accessed through different timelines and still remain part of a shared European history.



THE IRISH CASE

Marie-Claire Tuite,
*member of the History Teachers’
Association of Ireland (HTAI)*

Marie-Claire Tuite explained that history in Ireland is compulsory until the end of the Junior Cycle, while in the Senior Cycle it becomes optional, though it is still chosen by several thousand pupils each year.² She underlined that the structure of the Junior Cycle already reflects a layered approach, since it includes the nature of history, the history of Ireland, and the history of Europe and the wider world. This framework makes it possible to link national history to larger spaces rather than to isolate it. Tuite also showed that in Ireland, Europe is taught through several methodological approaches. Some teachers present it as a distinct topic, while others connect it to Irish history. One method is the use of parallel timelines, which allows pupils to see what happened at the same time in different places. Another one is the “lens” approach, which shifts between national, European and global levels. She also mentioned the role of the Irish diaspora, which helps connect Irish history to broader European movements and experiences.

What was especially interesting in the Irish case was the use of accessible classroom entry points. Tuite referred to examples such as the Eurovision Song Contest as ways to make Europe more concrete for pupils. This example demonstrated that **Europe**

does not need to be taught only through treaties and institutions, but can also be introduced through everyday cultural references already familiar to students. This makes the European dimension easier to approach, especially for younger learners. Furthermore, according to Tuite, teachers who themselves had a European experience such as an Erasmus exchange were more likely to teach Europe. This is an important finding, because it suggests that the European dimension depends not only on official frameworks, but also on educators’ own lived experiences. The more Europe is lived in practice, the easier it may become to teach it.



THE ARMENIAN CASE

Zohrab Gevorgyan,
*historian, education specialist
and history teaching expert*

The Armenian case study was presented by **Zohrab Gevorgyan**, who raised the issue of geographical perception and cultural stereotypes when dealing with the European dimension in history classes. While Armenia may not appear as one of the most integrated parts of Europe in geographical terms, it has strong historical and political links with Europe. This shows that **Europe is not a simple category in the classroom: it can be near and distant at the same time**. He also described the long “shadow” of Soviet narratives in Armenian textbooks. One 1985 textbook, for example, still presents Europe in negative ideological terms, as an “imperialist West”, with older Soviet interpretations still shaping explanations. He noted that such narratives are now being revised and that other historical reference points are being introduced into teaching. **This reveals how teaching Europe can change with political**

2. The Junior Cycle refers to the lower secondary level (three years; ages 12 or 13 to 15 or 16) and the Senior Cycle refers to the upper secondary level (generally ages 15 to 18). The Senior Cycle may be two or three years long depending on whether an optional Transition Year is taken. See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/observatory-history-teaching/ireland>, accessed 10 August 2026.

regimes and memory frameworks. An interesting aspect of Gevorgyan's intervention was the distinction between "Europe" and "European". Rather than treating Europe only as an outside entity, he suggested looking for the European dimension inside Armenia. This could be done through discussions of Hellenism, the Crusades, heraldic symbols, music or other historical traces. According to him, such an approach makes Europe less abstract and shows pupils that Europe is not only a distant political structure, but also a set of contacts, influences and cultural exchanges present within their own "personal" history.



THE GREEK CASE

Evangelia Choleva,
*history teacher and Doctor
of Philosophy of History
and Archaeology at the
University of Athens*

The intervention by **Evangelia Choleva** brought the discussion back to the practical limits of teaching. She stressed that **national history needs to be connected to European and global history, but underlined that this remains difficult in Greece. The main issue is a structural one, as the Greek school system is highly centralised and teachers work with one state-approved textbook, narrowing the possibilities for pedagogical flexibility.** This creates what she called a "structural impasse". Choleva pointed to several concrete obstacles in the Greek system. The first is that the dominant narrative of current textbooks is deeply ethnocentric. Another is the treatment of the Balkans mainly through rivalry, which makes it harder to build a sense of European cohesion at the regional level. She also noted that many history teachers are not

trained historians, which weakens disciplinary expertise and historical didactic approaches. In addition, teaching and learning methods still rely heavily on the memorisation of names, dates and periods, often at the expense of critical thinking. Time pressure is also a central issue, with teachers rarely having enough time to cover the whole curriculum, resulting in chapters on European or global history often being the first ones to be overlooked. This point echoed what had already been discussed in the first roundtable: even where curricula include a European dimension, implementation in the classroom remains uneven and fragile.

Overall, the second roundtable showed that teaching Europe is not only a question of content but also a question of method: whether to use parallel chronologies, multiple lenses, cultural references, local examples and/or comparative perspectives. It is also a question of confidence, since teachers are more likely to teach Europe well when they feel equipped to handle complexity and controversy.

This session made clear that the European dimension becomes real only through classroom practice. If teachers lack time, training or support, Europe may remain a formal or abstract objective without strong pedagogical application. If, however, teachers are able to connect multiple scales, use flexible methods and bring pupils into the discussion, Europe can become a meaningful and critical object of study rather than a distant institutional concept.

3

National narratives and the European dimension

The third roundtable addressed what was perhaps the most sensitive and most ambitious question of the symposium: how national narratives and the European dimension can be reconciled in history teaching. The session explored whether national history and European history must necessarily compete or whether they can be articulated in a more connected and multiperspective way.

The aim of this roundtable was to reflect on the tensions and possible complementarities between these two approaches. This made it a fitting final discussion because it brought together many of the underlying questions raised throughout the event: scale, identity, memory, conflict, political context and pedagogy.

The discussion drew on contributions from **Slovenia**, **Ukraine** and the **Jean Monnet House**, each of which approached the issue from a different angle.

THE SLOVENIAN CASE

Vojko Kunaver,

Senior Adviser for History Teaching at the National Education Institute and member of the OHE Governing Board

Drawing on the Slovenian experience, **Vojko Kunaver** stressed the importance of **raising awareness about the European dimension in history teaching**. He referred to a symposium organised in Slovenia where teachers made an effort to connect national history more explicitly to European history. In the Slovenian case, this link appears particularly meaningful because of the country's geographical and historical position, shaped by empires, shifting borders and the legacy of Yugoslavia. This suggests that **national history can itself be an entry point into Europe rather than a barrier to it**.

Kunaver also noted that approximately

45% of the curriculum is dedicated to European history.

This is significant because it shows a deliberate attempt to situate national history in a wider continental framework. His remarks suggested that one way of reconciling the two levels was not to oppose them, but to show how national history is embedded in larger European processes. In this view, Slovenia is not taught alongside Europe, but through Europe and within Europe.

Another important point in the Slovenian discussion concerned generational differences in experiences of Europe. Kunaver observed that the Erasmus Programme has had a positive effect on younger people, who more readily feel European, whereas older

generations may remain more attached to past political and regional frameworks, including nostalgia for Yugoslavia. This point connected with remarks made earlier in the symposium about the importance of lived European experience. It suggests that reconciliation between national and European perspectives is not only a curricular issue, but also a generational and social one.



THE UKRAINIAN CASE

Serhii Shkabko,

Head of the Expert Group for European Integration at the Ministry of Education and substitute member of the OSTE Governing Board

The Ukrainian contribution by **Serhii Shkabko** introduced a different perspective. **His intervention concerned the results of national consultations in Ukraine and raised the question of how Ukraine's historical position can be integrated into a broader European history.** This is a particularly sensitive issue in the current geopolitical context of Russia's war of aggression, with Ukraine's place in Europe representing both a historical and a contemporary political issue. This contribution showed that teaching Europe is never detached from present-day struggles connected to

belonging, sovereignty and political orientation. The Ukrainian case clearly pointed towards a major historiographical challenge: including Ukraine in European history is not just about adding another national story to a continental narrative, but also means rethinking Europe itself, whether its borders, centres or margins. The issue is therefore not only whether Ukraine belongs to Europe, but also how Europe is conceptualised in a way that can include histories long placed on its periphery.

THE JEAN MONNET HOUSE

Martí Grau Segú,

Director of the Jean Monnet House



Drawing on the experience of the European Parliament's history and heritage institutions – the Jean Monnet House and the House of European History – **Martí Grau Segú** emphasised a multiperspective approach to history teaching. Referring to the educational work of both institutions, including regular school visits, he emphasised the importance of encouraging students to explore Europe as an evolving historical construct rather than as a predefined political entity. He suggested that Europe should not be treated as beginning only



with modern institutions or post-Second World War integration. Instead, Europe must also be explored through intercontinental dynamics in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, through the gradual conceptualisation of Europe as a political space in the modern period, and through institutional ideas in the 19th and 20th centuries such as the Concert of Europe or the League of Nations. This longer chronology makes it easier to understand Europe as a changing historical construction rather than a recent political achievement.

Grau Segú also stressed the importance of resisting myths of origin. **A European history that simply seeks “pure” beginnings or a unified civilisational essence risks becoming simplistic and exclusionary. Instead, he advocated broadening the historical and political perspective by considering proto-European and pre-European forms of political organisation and by approaching Europe from both its centres and its peripheries.** This methodological perspective challenges centre-based narratives and encourages a more nuanced understanding of Europe’s historical development and of the multiple forms of European belonging that have emerged over time. Another important aspect of his intervention concerned colonialism, as teaching Europe from the perspective of colonial expansion reveals how European power was constructed through relations with the non-European world. Such an approach makes it more difficult to present Europe solely as a space of shared values or peaceful integration.

It calls for a more comprehensive understanding of European history, one that acknowledges experiences of domination, violence and exclusion alongside the development of law, co-operation and democratic values.

The contributions of this roundtable

did not argue for the replacement of national histories by a single supranational narrative, nor did they suggest that national narratives should remain untouched and self-contained. Rather, they pointed towards a more challenging model: one in which national histories are preserved, but constantly placed in relation to neighbouring histories, European frameworks and global entanglements. Even if all national narratives were placed side by side, that would not automatically create a coherent or meaningful European history.

The challenge is to create forms of teaching in which national and European dimensions complement one another, while acknowledging the diversity of perspectives, interpretations and debates that shape historical understanding.

Reconciliation does not mean absorbing every nation into a homogeneous whole, but rather creating dialogue between various scales and perspectives without erasing differences.



Youth, Europe and History

Presented by **Luigi Cajani**,
*retired Professor of History at the Sapienza University of Rome
and member of the OHTE Scientific Advisory Council*



The presentation of the **“Youth and History 2025”** project by **Luigi Cajani**, retired Professor of History at the Sapienza University of Rome and member of the OHTE Scientific Advisory Council, brought learners’ perspectives into the discussion on the European dimension in history education. While other contributions focused on curricula, institutions and teaching practices, this presentation shifted attention to how young people themselves relate to Europe’s past and how they perceive the role of history in understanding contemporary Europe.

The ongoing project explores how young people from several European countries engage with European history, respond to controversial historical issues and view the challenges facing Europe today. By presenting the initial findings of a survey targeting fifteen-year-old pupils, Cajani added an empirical perspective to the symposium. By examining the links between history teaching, historical knowledge, values and civic attitudes, the study is an important exploration of how Europe is perceived by those who are currently being educated within the national school systems.

The survey addressed broad questions about the meaning pupils attach to history, the periods and regions that interest them most, and their relationship with Europe’s past.

The findings suggest that young people tend to show greater interest in European history than in regions beyond Europe, indicating that Europe remains an important reference point in their historical understanding.

The project also examined the relationship between historical learning and personal values. **One notable finding was that freedom of speech appeared highly significant for many pupils, while democracy as a broader concept seemed less prominent.** This raised important questions: do young people connect different political concepts and values, or do they tend to consider them separately? And how does their understanding of history influence their views of these issues? The question therefore goes beyond the acquisition of historical facts and concerns the role of history education in helping learners critically engage with political and social issues. In this context, the survey explored pupils’ views on a range of contested topics, including colonialism, reparations for past injustices, migration, abortion, the exploitation of less developed countries and the use of European armed forces within the United Nations framework. The findings highlight the importance of understanding how historical consciousness influences attitudes towards contemporary issues.

The presentation highlighted **two key points** relevant to the symposium's reflection on the European dimension in history education.

1 First, it showed that Europe remains meaningful for young people, although their perceptions are diverse and not always based on a single or consistent understanding of Europe.

2 Second, it confirmed that history teaching has an impact beyond the classroom: it influences how pupils approach complex issues, engage with democratic values and develop the competences needed to participate in society.

Research of this kind is therefore essential, as it helps connect the objectives of history education with the ways in which historical knowledge and narratives are received, discussed and carried forward by young people.





CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions



The symposium showed that the question of the European dimension in history teaching cannot be reduced to a technical curricular issue. During the different discussions and debates, a common idea emerged: **Teaching Europe always involves a deeper reflection on how historical communities are defined, how collective narratives are transmitted, and how democratic co-existence may be sustained through education. Europe appeared throughout the symposium not as a self-evident object, but as a historical, political and pedagogical construction that remains open and debated.**

One major contribution of the symposium was to clarify the diversity of ideas of "Europe", challenging the conflation of Europe with the EU alone. The keynote insisted on the need to distinguish between several scales of Europe, as well as to place the EU within a broader European architecture including other organisations, historical experiences and political traditions. This idea reappeared as a constant thread in discussions, where the examples of the Council of Europe, border regions, post-imperial spaces, and countries situated at Europe's political or cultural

margins all showed that Europe is larger, more layered and more contested than a purely institutional reading of the EU.

The contributions throughout the symposium also repeatedly challenged the tendency to begin the story of European unification only from 1945 and formal post-war integration. Europe can be approached through Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the modern conceptualisation of Europe as a political space, and 19th-century projects of order and co-operation. **Therefore, interwar projects, earlier diplomatic frameworks and even longer intellectual and political genealogies are indispensable for understanding European construction. A meaningful European history teaching must avoid a narrow EU-centred narrative and instead introduce pupils to the plurality of "Europes" that have existed and still co-exist.**

The discussions demonstrated that there is no uniform European model in national curricula. Europe is present in a multitude of ways according to countries, traditions, school structures and political cultures. In some systems, Europe may appear through common heritage, institutions,

geopolitics and civic education. In others, Europe may be present, but its coverage is constrained by textbook-centred approaches, overloaded programmes, politicisation or the sensitivity of topics. As examples from some countries showed, curricular revision may offer the potential to widen the scope and shift attention from content alone to skills and multiple identities.

At the same time, the European dimension in history education is shaped not only by what is taught in the curriculum, but also by how people interpret it in practice. While young people still relate strongly to Europe, this relation is selective, sometimes unstable and mediated by present-day concerns. History teaching shaped by a European dimension plays an essential role in civic instruction by helping pupils connect values, institutions and historical experiences. Furthermore, the symposium affirmed that teachers are central intermediaries of the European dimension. They decide whether Europe is taught as an isolated chapter, a comparative framework, a set of lived cultural references, or an implicit background to national history. Challenges such as centralisation, lack of teacher specialisation, and time pressure can weaken the implementation of broader perspectives. Across national examples, one element became clear: Europe in the classroom depends not only on defined programmes and frameworks, but on teacher training, pedagogical freedom, professional confidence and lived experience.

On a larger level, the discussions emphasised that European history cannot be constructed simply by adding or erasing national stories. National narratives remain powerful because they are inherently linked to memory and identity. Rather than replacing national histories, the European dimension should place them in dialogue with one another and within broader European and global

contexts, enabling learners to develop a more nuanced understanding of Europe's diverse and interconnected past. Teachers' experiences shared during the symposium showed that national, European and global scales can be connected through parallel timelines, multiple lenses and familiar cultural entry points. In some cases, when political regimes and inherited textbook narratives shape the very possibility of speaking about Europe, it was suggested that Europe may be searched for within local histories rather than only outside them.





It therefore remains crucial to acknowledge the asymmetries and divides that still structure the teaching of Europe. Several interventions suggested that there remains a contrast between Western settings where Europe may be more institutionally embedded, and Eastern or post-Soviet settings where Europe may still be burdened by inherited geopolitical sensitivities. At the same time, the symposium showed that such a divide should not be simplified. New reforms in several countries demonstrate active efforts to broaden the European dimension. Conversely, even in countries where Europe is already strongly present in education, implementation may be hindered by curricular overload, rigid structures or lack of pedagogical time.³ **The real divide is therefore not simply between East and West, but also between formal curricular intention and actual classroom practice.**

In this context, a common European approach to history teaching cannot mean a single textbook, a single narrative or a uniform chronology for the entire continent. It should instead be understood as a shared pedagogical horizon, based on several converging principles:

- **comparison across national cases,**
- **multiperspectivity,**
- **critical thinking,**
- **attention to controversial issues,**
- **openness to Europe's internal plurality,**
- **integration of Europe into wider global histories.**

3. The first OHTE general report on the state of history teaching in Europe (2023) found these issues to be among the most frequently cited challenges for history educators across the OHTE member states. See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/observatory-history-teaching/general-report>, accessed 10 August 2026.

In other words, commonality should lie less in identical content than in shared methods and shared intellectual ambitions. Particular attention should also be given to the role of language, historical perspective and sensitivity, recognising that the words used to describe the past shape historical understanding and influence classroom discussion. This is

why multiperspectivity, as promoted by the Council of Europe and repeatedly emphasised throughout the symposium, is a pedagogical necessity: **teaching Europe critically means acknowledging conflict, domination, resistance and exclusion, alongside co-operation, law, democracy and peace.**

Such a prospective model would require concrete educational choices:

1 First, European history should be taught at multiple scales: local, national, regional, continental and global.

2 Second, it should include institutions and lived experiences, integration and Euroscepticism, common values and conflicts.

3 Third, pupils should be encouraged to approach Europe not as a closed identity, but as a subject to think through, question and historicise.





If such a shared framework is to remain compatible with European diversity, it must also preserve the legitimacy of national histories while changing the way they are taught. The objective is not to weaken national narratives by replacing them with an abstract supranational discourse, but rather to contextualise them. A national history that is related to broader European and global developments becomes less enclosed and more intelligible. In the same way, a European history that recognises different national entry points, asymmetries and often marginalised perspectives becomes less doctrinal and more credible.

The symposium pointed towards a demanding but promising conclusion: Europe can and should be taught in common, but not exactly in the same way everywhere. Its teaching must rest on a shared commitment to critical thinking, multiperspectivity and democratic values, while accepting that historical experiences, sensitivities and pedagogical pathways will remain diverse.

The symposium in Athens outlined the foundations of a European approach to history teaching that is intellectually rigorous, pedagogically plural and politically lucid.

By bringing together curricula, teachers, students and historical narratives, it showed that the future of Europe in education depends less on the production of one common story than on the capacity to organise meaningful dialogue between a plurality of different stories.

That may well be the most realistic and the most valuable form of common European history teaching: a teaching of Europe through diversity and a teaching of diversity through Europe.

Across Europe, questions of identity, memory and belonging are increasingly at the heart of public debate - and history education carries a particular responsibility in how they are addressed. But what does it mean to teach and learn "Europe" in history classes?

Following a series of national History Symposia held across its member states in 2025 and 2026, the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTe) brought their conclusions together at a culminating Symposium in Athens in June 2026, examining how Europe is defined, framed and taught across very different national systems.

This report captures the main conclusions of the keynote by Professor Birte Wassenberg and the discussions and presentations held during the Athens History Symposium "The European dimension in national systems". Weaving in the findings of the latest OHTe General Report on the state of history teaching in Europe, it shows that the European and national dimensions of history are not competing frameworks but complementary ways of understanding the past - and that the future of Europe in education depends less on a single shared narrative than on the capacity to hold a plurality of stories in dialogue.

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