Where learners meet history: reaffirming the role of history education in the 21st century

General report
Fourth Annual Forum
for History Education

Budapest, 11-13 June 2025

Where learners meet history: reaffirming the role of history education in the 21st century

General report Fourth Annual Forum for History Education

European Youth Centre Budapest, 11-13 June 2025

General Rapporteur
Susanne Popp

Council of Europe

The opinions expressed in this work are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

The reproduction of extracts (up to 500 words) is authorised, except for commercial purposes, as long as the integrity of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used out of context, does not provide incomplete information or does not otherwise mislead the reader as to the nature, scope or content of the text. The source text must always be acknowledged as follows "© Council of Europe, year of the publication". All other requests concerning the reproduction/translation of all or part of the document should be addressed to the Directorate of Communications, Council of Europe (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int).

All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the DGII of the Council of Europe Democracy and Human Dignity

Education Department
Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
France
E-mail: education@coe.int

Cover design and layout: : Publications and Visual Identity Division (DPIV), Council of Europe

Cover photo: © Shutterstock

© Council of Europe, January 2026
Printed at the Council of Europe

Contents

INTRODUCTION 5
REPORT OF THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR 7
Between use and misuse: history, memory and civic responsibility 7
Teaching history online: reliability, relevance and media literacy 9
Museums and history education in the digital age: challenges and opportunities 10
History textbooks in the digital era: balancing stability and innovation 10
Teaching history through archives: digital access and democratic participation 11
Social media and AI: impact on learners and history education 11
Chatbots and AI in history education 12
Ethical and practical challenges for history education in the 21st century 13
Conclusion 13
Recommendations 14
OPENING KEYNOTE: REAFFIRMING THE ROLE OF HISTORY EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY 15
History is meaning-making 15
Including societal values 16
What is important to learn? 16
Conclusion 16
References 16
WHERE AND HOW DO STUDENTS MEET HISTORY? A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE 17
WHERE AND HOW DO STUDENTS MEET HISTORY? A LEARNER'S PERSPECTIVE 19
Introduction 19
The modern landscape of historical encounters 19
The challenge: whose history gets told? 19
The opportunity: history as a democratic practice 20
A call for systemic change 20
WAR IN COURT: A PROJECT OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF THE NETHERLANDS 21
The War in Court project: aims and challenges 21
Current and future perspectives 21
THREE-POINT PROBLEM: ON THE ROLE OF GENERATIVE AI IN HISTORY EDUCATION AND MEMORY 23
References 25
STATE OBLIGATIONS IN THE FIELD OF HISTORY EDUCATION 27
Introduction 27
The state obligation to respect 27
The state obligation to protect 28
The state obligation to promote 28
The state obligation to make reparation 28
The state obligation to prevent 29
Conclusion 29
THE ILLIBERAL TURN IN HISTORY TEACHING: MECHANISMS AND AGENTS OF THE TRANSFORMATION 31
Introduction 31
Characteristics of the illiberal transformation 31
Mechanisms of implementation: how does the illiberal turn happen? 32
Conclusion 34
Further reading 34
MULTIPERSPECTIVITY IN REMEMBRANCE AND HISTORY EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP 35
Introduction: history education for democratic citizenship 35
Key themes and challenges 35
Bridging formal and non-formal education 35
Case study: Spain and Navarra 35
Multiperspective history education 36
Recommendations and future directions 36
Conclusion 36
APPENDIX 1 – FORUM PROGRAMME 37
APPENDIX 2 – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS 41

Introduction

Democratic backsliding can be understood, among other things, as the unravelling of our relationship to history – as the reflection that historical narratives, the so-called "national stories", appear increasingly out of step with the reality of our societies and can no longer serve as a shared foundation for living together. It is at the level of communities, of groups once marginalised (see the reflections of Panagiotis Chatzimichail), that new narratives are being developed – stories that are not only those of the victors or of those who hold the pen but also of those who have been rendered invisible, excluded from the realm of thought. Since Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991), we know that these narratives – from national myths to community memories – are ideological constructions. They certainly carry risks, such as confining identities, yet they also form a binding agent for the groups concerned and can play a decisive role in civic empowerment.

In this context, multiperspectivity calls for understanding that a historical narrative must resemble a pluralistic ancient chorus; one that accepts both its paradoxes and its contradictions (recalling Tzvetan Todorov's idea of Europe as a continent of paradox – the continent of 5th-century Athens and that of Auschwitz, that of the Enlightenment and that of the Gulag). It is therefore necessary to restore meaning around a shared narrative, to listen together (see the contribution of Hendrik Atze van Doezum) and to embrace its polyphony. History can unite as much as divide. Promoting multiperspectivity from the local to the European level means making heard the unity of the continent's history within its diversity.

In terms of transmission, it is about supporting research and the development of the histories of the invisible, working on issues of memory across the continent and making use of all the spaces where history is transmitted – memorial sites, school textbooks, archives, digital environments and more. It is also necessary to recognise all forms of learning: formal, non-formal and informal education. The challenge is to enable everyone to reconnect with history wherever they may encounter it in their everyday lives (see the keynote by Niklas Ammert). In an age of historical distortions and manipulations, all of this must of course be considered in connection with generative artificial intelligence (AI). Too many learners expect knowledge and answers from this tool. However, AI is not a thinking machine – it is a machine that accumulates statistical data and its results merely reflect those data (see the contribution of Mykola Makhortykh). Yet generative AI can be a learning tool, provided one knows how to use it with critical thinking. After all, history, as a human science, has its own methodology: the search for written and material sources, their critical analysis and the comparison of different types of evidence. And the ways in which we preserve and engage with these sources even have a weight on legislation and public policy, as demonstrated by the contribution of Tom De Smet.

A historical discourse for the 21st century must be one that supports democracy, the rule of law and the absolute respect for human rights. Amid global disorder and the rise of illiberal democracies where too many citizens hope for "benevolent autocracies" (see the testimony and analysis of Andrea Pető), what then are the roles and responsibilities of public authorities, particularly in historical education? Both the article by Antoon De Baets and the contribution by Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe member Luz Martínez Seijo offer important avenues for reflection.

The Fourth Forum for History Education at the European Youth Centre Budapest, following those of Belgrade, Brussels and Bologna, provides some possible responses to these challenges through expert interventions, roundtables and exchanges of teaching practices, and student perspectives (represented by the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) and the European Students' Union (ESU)). From these, potential avenues for future work and political development emerge. Susanne Popp's report presents them in a comprehensive form.

Added to the regulatory texts adopted over the past two decades, the ongoing drafting of a new recommendation on history in the digital age and the work and publications of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, the four Forum reports now offer all stakeholders a common foundation for developing their actions. As laboratories of ideas and exchange, these Forums have been and continue to be opportunities for all actors to reflect on history, its teaching and its culture in this first quarter of the 21st century. By acknowledging challenges and problems, by recognising the multiplicity of places where each of us encounters history and by keeping in mind future issues, all while maintaining a European perspective, there lie potential pathways to support and strengthen democracy. Today, 70 years after its adoption, the European Cultural Convention remains more than ever our compass – for promoting our heritage and shared past also means laying the foundation for our common future.

Report of the General Rapporteur

Susanne Popp
Honorary President, International Society for History Didactics

The Council of Europe has consistently highlighted history education as a cornerstone of democratic culture, intercultural dialogue and respect for human rights. In line with this mission, it has convened annual Forums on History Education since 2022, providing platforms for public authorities, teachers, learners, academics, curriculum developers, and civil society to reflect on how history is taught and learned across Europe.

The programme's guiding motto – "Teaching history, grounding democracy" – reflects the conviction that historical knowledge and consciousness are not abstract academic concerns but living resources for strengthening democratic societies. Each Forum has served as a laboratory for dialogue, exchange of practice and co-construction of recommendations.

The first three Forums addressed pressing contemporary issues from different angles:

- Belgrade (2022) – Sites of memory: learning spaces for democracy;
- Brussels (2023) – History education in the digital age;
- Bologna (2024) – Reinforcing historical awareness and culture through higher education: threats and challenges.

The Fourth Forum for History Education, held in Budapest from 11 to 13 June 2025, continued this tradition while opening a new chapter. Its theme – "Where learners meet history: reaffirming the role of history education in the 21st century" – placed learners at the centre of reflection. The venue, the European Youth Centre in Budapest, symbolically underscored the role of young people in shaping the future of democratic societies and aligned with the Council of Europe's "Learners First" Education Strategy (2024-2030).

The Forum was explicitly connected to broader Council of Europe initiatives, including the Reykjavik Declaration (2023) and the New Democratic Pact for Europe (2025). It also marked the conclusion of the current intergovernmental programme on history education, paving the way for a new programme to be launched in 2026.

The Forum pursued three interrelated objectives:

1. to reaffirm the role of history education in the 21st century by considering how learners encounter and engage with history in diverse contexts – schools, universities, memorials, museums, digital environments and public debates;
2. to integrate lessons from the preceding three Forums, bringing together memory, digitalisation and higher education into a holistic vision of history education;
3. to position history education as a lifelong learning process, recognising that learners encounter the past in multiple formal and informal spaces, bringing their own experiences, values and perspectives to these encounters.

In doing so, the Forum addressed both continuity and change: reaffirming long-held Council of Europe principles – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – while confronting new challenges in history education, including digital technologies, disinformation and changing forms of civic participation, and exploring questions crucial for strengthening history education to support a resilient democracy.

Between use and misuse: history, memory and civic responsibility

The contributions of the opening session framed the central theme "Where learners meet history: reaffirming the role of history education in the 21st century" within a wider reflection on the urgent relationship between history and democracy. It was emphasised that today's learners are exposed to more history than any previous generation, primarily through their intensive engagement with social media and other online content. Yet this abundance of history does not necessarily foster deeper historical understanding. On the contrary, the very logics of social media – now increasingly shaped and amplified by AI – encourage representations of the past that bypass gatekeeping and fact-checking, leaving them vulnerable to populist simplifications, half-truths, disinformation and even myth-making and conspiracy narratives.

For learners, this creates challenges that cannot be underestimated. A democratic society cannot afford to allow populist and antidemocratic narratives, cloaked in the authority of "history", to shape, influence and manipulate the minds of young people.

As was also emphasised, social media are not the only problem. Across Europe, political interventions in the ways history is taught in schools threaten to undermine liberal principles such as multiperspectivity, tolerance and scientific rigour – principles that must always be considered as inseparably linked. Liberal trends can shape the design of history curricula and textbooks, but they may also extend to public history institutions such as museums and archives, which play – or should play – a vital role in shaping how learners encounter the past.

In his keynote, Niklas Ammert, Pro Vice-Chancellor at Linnaeus University, highlighted the "use and misuse of history" as a central challenge of historical culture – one that students inevitably face whenever they engage with the past. He drew on Timothy Snyder's *On tyranny: twenty lessons from the twentieth century,*[1] in which Snyder contrasts two influential interpretative frameworks: a politics of inevitability and a politics of eternity. Both, as Ammert stressed, represent deeply troubling ways of dealing with history that undermine the democratic role of history. The politics of inevitability assumes that history follows a predetermined path toward democracy and prosperity, fostering complacency as if no alternative futures exist. The politics of eternity, by contrast, portrays history as a timeless struggle of the pure nation against external and internal enemies. It erases the idea of progress and replaces responsibility with cycles of victimhood and blame.

For contemporary history education, the implications are profound. Both narratives hinder critical engagement with the past: inevitability discourages questioning, while eternity reduces history to myth. History education, by contrast, must cultivate what Snyder calls a politics of responsibility: empowering students to recognise history as contingent, shaped by human choices and relevant for democratic agency in the present.

Matjaž Gruden, Director for Democracy at the Council of Europe, took up this diagnosis of Snyder in his opening address, linking it to the themes of history education, democracy, and the boundaries of freedom, as well as their challenges for democratic societies. A democracy grounded in human rights must prepare young people for active citizenship while resisting extremist ideologies – whether from the right, the left or other populist forms of antidemocratic manipulation. History teaching should not fuel conflict but foster critical engagement, while drawing firm boundaries against those who instrumentalise historical narratives for dehumanisation, propaganda or disinformation. As was highlighted in his intervention, both historical scholarship and history education are intrinsically aligned with democratic principles: evidence, transparency, plurality of perspectives and openness to critique. They must therefore be clearly distinguished from discourses that reject these foundations: the right to freedom of expression is not absolute and the diversity of perspectives reaches its limits when it is used to deny or distort historical facts. There can be no legitimacy for Holocaust denial or genocide relativisation, no tolerance for racist or dehumanising interpretations of the past, and no acceptance of deliberate historical disinformation aimed at undermining democratic order.

Gruden further stressed that before 1989, history education was not a prominent concern of the European Union; the focus lay instead on future development. At the same time, most people were still acutely aware of what it meant to live under a dictatorship, subject to systematic distortion of truth – and in particular of historical truth. Today, one generation later – 30 years on – history has become such a prominent theme across all spheres of society that the enemies of democracy now exploit it insidiously. They rely on the fact that young people can scarcely imagine what it means to live under dictatorship. In response, Gruden insisted that we cannot afford pessimism. Everything must be done to restore trust in democracy through history education and to develop the necessary means and methods for this task.

One key outcome of the Forum's discussions was the recognition that the themes of the use and misuse of history, as well as the limits of democratic freedom of speech and the principle of multiperspectivity, must be explicitly addressed in the history classroom. Participants emphasised that learners need the competence to clearly distinguish between legitimate historical interpretation and distortion whenever they encounter history – whether in the classroom, on social media or in public culture.

In his opening address, Jean-Philippe Restoueix of the Council of Europe's intergovernmental programme on history education highlighted the increasing prominence of historical narratives, debates and discourses online and the urgent need for new European guidelines on freedom of expression, particularly regarding the limits of "alternative perspectives" within multiperspectivity – for both learners and teachers. He stressed that students must be able to distinguish clearly between the democratic use of multiperspectivity and its abuse to harm or undermine civil society. Only then can they grasp the meaning of critical thinking and responsible citizenship in historical education and establish principled boundaries against the misuse of history.

1. Snyder T. (2018), *On tyranny: twenty lessons from the twentieth century*, Tim Duggan Books.

The core theme of the opening – the multiple challenges involved in examining how learners encounter history – resurfaced throughout most discussions at the Fourth Forum for History Education. In the general debate following the opening, participants repeatedly confirmed widespread concerns regarding social media and other online content, as well as the broader dissemination of so-called "alternative interpretations", including the increasing public visibility of National Socialist propaganda in European states. Other participants highlighted that the challenges of implementing multiperspectivity in history education extend beyond the risk of antidemocratic misuse. As Arthur Chapman emphasised in his commentary, "multiperspectivity is easier said than done." Participants observed that the sheer plurality of perspectives can overwhelm students, who often lack a solid factual foundation or the skills for independent research and fact-checking. As a result, they struggle to understand, relate to and critically evaluate these multiple viewpoints. Some teachers described this experience as students being lost in a "jungle of perspectives", a view confirmed by attending students, who nonetheless did not fundamentally reject the principle of multiperspectivity.

Teaching history online: reliability, relevance and media literacy

The first contribution to Panel 1 was presented by Hendrik Atze van Doezum, a Dutch history teacher at Lauwers College in Buitenpost, Friesland. Known online as "Meneer van Doezum", he began developing curriculum-aligned video lessons during the Covid-19 pandemic, sharing them via YouTube and social media. In 2022 and 2023, he was named History Teacher of the Year in the Netherlands and now serves as an ambassador for history education.

Van Doezum emphasised that online history should not be left to the unregulated proliferation of content on social media. His lessons aim to provide reliable historical knowledge, foster critical media literacy and help students evaluate online content. He also stresses connecting history to students' contemporary lives, demonstrating that understanding the past is essential for interpreting the present – linking lessons to democracy, constitutional rights, disinformation and conspiracy theories.

In the workshop, participants explored key themes and challenges related to social media and online content in the history classroom. A central topic was the relationship between media literacy and historical skills. It was widely emphasised that media literacy does not replace traditional historical competencies but builds upon them. Established methods of source criticism remain indispensable for evaluating historical content online and are strategically crucial in the digital age. This foundation can be systematically adapted and extended to online content, for example by examining how multimodality shapes historical messaging on social media or how algorithms determine the selection of material presented to individual students. Equally indispensable is cultivating students' ability to cross-check claims, verify facts and identify bias, a skill that must be systematically taught in the history classroom with appropriate guidance and time. Some participants suggested that videos showcasing concrete examples of historians' reasoning and debates could serve as powerful classroom resources, vividly demonstrating historical critical thinking and rigorous approaches to evidence.

The discussion also highlighted the challenges teachers face in fostering critical media literacy. Preparing students for a rapidly evolving digital environment is difficult, as tools like ChatGPT, unknown just a few years ago, demonstrate the speed of change and the need for ongoing professional development. History teaching is already time-constrained, and adding responsibilities without support risks overburdening teachers and undermining their effectiveness. Many face severe pressure and shortages of qualified history teachers further exacerbate these challenges, limiting time for reflection and professional growth.

Finally, participants emphasised that teaching history in the digital age often exceeds the capacity of individual teachers. They stressed that regulating digital platforms and algorithms is essential, as schools alone cannot counter the broader forces shaping online information, and even well-taught media literacy skills can be undermined by adaptive algorithms. Furthermore, participants raised additional concerns: without strong leadership and clear policies, teachers risk isolation when addressing controversial or sensitive content. They also noted that maintaining teacher authority is increasingly challenging in an era where expertise – both genuine and false – is blurred by user-generated content on social media.

Participants further noted the influence of social media and AI on student attitudes and habits. Young people increasingly seek shortcuts, relying on TikTok, chatbots or AI-generated summaries rather than engaging deeply with texts. Teachers expressed the need for strategies and guidelines to counter superficial engagement and to cultivate ambition, depth and resilience in learning. Building on this concern, opinions differed on what teachers should prioritise: some argued for focusing on developing substantial historical knowledge as a foundation for fact-checking and detecting bias, while others emphasised fostering critical competencies that enable students to analyse and question all forms of information.

Overall, the workshop underscored that historical methods of critical inquiry remain central to both history literacy and media literacy, supporting resilience against digital disinformation and AI-driven challenges. However, effective media literacy in history education requires adequate resources, institutional backing and recognition of the limits of what schools can achieve in the face of a fast-changing digital environment.

Museums and history education in the digital age: challenges and opportunities

The second contribution of Panel 1 highlighted museums as essential spaces where learners encounter history. In the digital age, museums play a crucial role: the legacy of the past they preserve provides a tangible, authentic counterbalance to the virtual nature of digital engagement with history. Historical objects enable direct interaction with the past, while contemporary museum educators – exemplified by Inês Fialho Brandão – develop innovative approaches that bridge materiality with digital media and AI. Online resources offered by museums further complement classroom teaching, providing reliable, expert-driven content accessible beyond temporal or spatial limits.

The contribution of Fialho Brandão, Head of Cultural and Digital Mediation at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, showcased projects using AI and digital tools to engage visitors while critically reflecting on their ethical and educational implications. She positioned museums as spaces for democratic dialogue and promotes inclusive, participatory learning with schools to foster critical thinking and multiperspectivity. Initiatives such as MuseoBot[2] use AI to create personalised, reflective experiences, connect historical objects to contemporary issues and support active engagement with cultural heritage. Fialho Brandão emphasised experimentation, methodological flexibility and close collaboration between schools and museums as the foundation of effective learning.

The workshop confirmed museums' enormous potential as educational resources – through both artefacts and digital offerings – while highlighting persistent challenges. From the museum perspective, programmes often cannot fully adapt to classroom needs due to limited exchange, capacity or institutional support. Collaboration with schools is frequently fragmented, unstable and hindered by logistical or bureaucratic obstacles. While online mediation is increasingly used, it cannot replace direct engagement with teachers and students. Not all history teachers are open to new approaches in museum education: a narrow understanding of the potential of museum visits can lead to standardised, "factory-like" experiences that fail to spark curiosity or foster critical historical thinking.

Teachers also noted challenges: curricular constraints often exclude transversal or alternative narratives, creating gaps between classroom practice and museum offerings. Time pressures can lead teachers to outsource history teaching to museums rather than pursue true co-creation.

Addressing these challenges requires aligning museum programmes with curricula, ensuring scheduling flexibility and building stable school–museum networks supported by policy and funding. Teacher training – both pre-service and in-service – is essential to prepare educators for effective collaboration, integrating visits into lessons, fostering engagement and strengthening historical understanding.

Overall, the workshop clearly demonstrated that the current moment presents a strong opportunity to advance school–museum co-operation for democratic historical learning in the digital age. Structured collaboration between history classes, museums and archives – both in person and online – should become a central element of future digital strategies in history education.

History textbooks in the digital era: balancing stability and innovation

Printed history textbooks have long remained the cornerstone of history education, often representing learners' only systematic encounter with the past. Aleksandar Todosijević, a Serbian history teacher and textbook author, has been pivotal in advancing history education in the Balkans through innovative approaches to teaching sensitive and controversial topics. While many modern textbooks are designed as interactive workbooks – developing historical skills, fostering critical thinking and opening multiple perspectives – the high costs of production mean that older, traditional textbooks, often presenting a single master narrative, remain widely used. Political pressures can further entrench these singular perspectives, which, if relied upon exclusively by teachers, risk undermining the quality of history teaching.

The workshop examined the defining features of effective history textbooks and their integration into classroom practice. Participants emphasised that textbooks should function as dynamic working tools rather than static repositories, offering meaningful learning opportunities, diverse materials and links to digital and multimedia resources, ensuring clarity and accessibility for all learners. Teachers should complement textbooks with their own questions, reflections and supplementary materials, highlighting

2. See: https://gulbenkian.pt/museu/en/agenda/museobot-museums-democracy-and-artificial-intelligence/.

the essential role of high-quality teacher training and systematic professional development.

Despite production challenges, participants agreed that printed textbooks remain indispensable, providing teachers and students with reliable, pedagogically advanced guidance for rich, informed and reflective historical learning. They also offer professional support and confidence for teachers navigating contested historical debates. Even in the digital 21st century, amid vulnerabilities in democratic systems, teachers continue to regard printed textbooks as a central and stabilising medium.

Digital textbooks, delivered via publishers' platforms and offering a wealth of materials and sources, were only discussed briefly at the workshop. While this abundance is recognised as a clear advantage, participants cautioned that digital content can be more easily altered and is therefore potentially more susceptible to political influence, whereas printed textbooks continue to provide enduring stability and resistance to such pressures.

Teaching history through archives: digital access and democratic participation

The first contribution of Panel 2 by Tom De Smet, Deputy Director of the National Archives of the Netherlands, emphasised the role of archives as a cornerstone of democracy and highlighted the importance of transparency and accessibility for democratic societies. He stressed that digitisation is essential for preserving archival materials, expanding public access and supporting research and education, including initiatives that engage schools. At the same time he acknowledged key challenges: digitisation requires substantial resources, long-term technological solutions and careful handling of sensitive information. Not all archives and archival materials can be digitised, necessitating selective prioritisation, and the release of certain materials such as those documenting citizens' actions during the Second World War[3] can provoke public debate and unrest. Nevertheless, these challenges do not diminish the fundamental importance of archives for a resilient democracy.

The workshop focused on the following questions: What are participants' experiences of co-operation between history teachers and museums? How should effective collaboration between schools and archives be structured? What do pupils, teachers and museum professionals need to make such co-operation meaningful? What does the shift from material to digital archives imply for history teaching?

The discussion underlined that both learners and teachers require support, for instance the provision and contextualisation of appropriate historical sources by archivists as well as guidelines for methodological approaches, to work effectively with archival materials. Conversely, archivists engaging with schools need deeper exchange with history teachers to better understand classroom conditions, needs and expectations and thus design targeted pedagogical strategies and resources.

Concerning digitised archival material, participants highlighted the advantages for teaching: documents are easily accessible, free of temporal or spatial limitations, can be rapidly translated and are often contextualised on websites. At the same time, teachers stressed the need for broader conceptual frameworks that guide co-operation between schools, archives and museums while taking into account curricular requirements and time constraints. The question of digitised materials was also discussed in light of the growing influence of AI. The situation is ambivalent: while digital access to archival resources offers clear benefits, risks include misinterpretation of sources, reliance on AI-generated analyses, oversimplification of complex historical contexts and potential bias introduced by digital tools. Simultaneously, archives provide a tangible, material experience which may be particularly valuable in pupils' lives that are otherwise strongly shaped by digital environments. Finally, the group noted that dedicated funding schemes for school–museum and school–archive partnerships would be highly desirable.

Social media and AI: impact on learners and history education

In the 21st century, digital platforms and social media – shaped increasingly by generative AI – play a central role for learners seeking and using historical information. In her contribution to Panel 2, Sophie Gebeil, contemporary historian at Aix-Marseille University and member of the TELEMMe[4] research unit, drew on her expertise at the intersection of history, digital humanities and communication sciences to examine how students construct and share perceptions of the past through online content. She highlighted in particular the use of digital archives, which provide direct access to historical materials and foster critical engagement while stressing the need for teachers to guide students not only in navigating archives but also the wider internet. Such guidance should develop skills of verification, critical analysis and interpretation, supported by structured instruction and reflective practice.

3. See the project Oorlog voor de Rechter [War in Court]: https://oorlogvoorderechter.nl/.

4. See https://telemme.mmsh.fr.

The workshop explored the influence of digital technology and generative AI on history education across three dimensions: how students access information, their needs in relation to digital technology, and the roles of public authorities and civil society organisations.

The first central theme was how students access historical information. Gebeil emphasised that understanding learners' actual media practices is essential. Many, for example, use ChatGPT as a search engine or answer machine, often without evaluating accuracy, sources, context or the algorithmic logics shaping results. Rather than assuming digital literacy will develop independently, she argued that information-seeking tasks should be integrated into classroom practice where students can acquire these skills in a structured environment.

Participants agreed that a solid foundation of historical knowledge is indispensable. Without it, students cannot meaningfully assess or contextualise information encountered on social media or through AI. Foundational knowledge must therefore be built in tandem with critical media literacy. Instruction should also address practical strategies, such as keyword selection, search engine use and source evaluation. Many students struggle to distinguish trustworthy from unreliable content and training should begin early. While some advocated early digital education, others voiced concerns about screen exposure and developmental risks for younger children.

A key insight was the need to teach students the distinction between information and knowledge. As one participant noted: "the internet offers plenty of information, but not necessarily knowledge". Information becomes knowledge only through processing, contextualisation and critical assessment by the learner.

Teachers also pointed to practical challenges. Subject-specific content coverage often leaves little time or confidence to teach digital literacy. Participants stressed the importance of professional development and adequate time to meet these responsibilities. The workshop further highlighted the need for research into effective methods for teaching digital and AI literacy in history education. Questions included whether fabricated information could be used as a training tool for critical thinking and how digital literacy might be organised as a transversal task across subjects.

Another recurring theme emphasised the importance of teaching students that they are not passive consumers of online information but active responsible participants – producers and disseminators whose choices inevitably shape the circulation of both historical knowledge and misinformation. In the digital world, use directly influences how frequently content is displayed and circulated. Younger students in particular may forward disinformation uncritically, raising concerns of responsibility for both learners and educators, especially with sensitive or controversial topics.

Several participants also noted that students are often overwhelmed by the sheer plurality of perspectives online and asked what strategies might best support them in navigating this complexity.

Finally, the workshop considered the role of public authorities and civil society. Some participants stressed the need for stronger regulation of the internet, social media and AI, while others emphasised that education must remain human-centred: AI cannot replace teachers. Collaboration with civil society organisations, particularly those active in inclusion and teacher training, was identified as especially valuable, as such organisations often address needs that formal institutions cannot fully meet, complementing official education and providing essential support to both teachers and learners.

Chatbots and AI in history education

In the final contribution to Panel 2, Mykola Makhortykh, Alfred Landauer Lecturer at the University of Bern's Institute of Communication and Media Studies, examined the influence of digital platforms and AI on Holocaust remembrance. His research focuses on algorithmic systems, AI-generated content and their effects on how historical information is accessed, interpreted and shared. Drawing on these insights, Makhortykh reflected on the broader implications for history education, emphasising ethical challenges, the risk of misinformation and the importance of fostering critical thinking, responsible use of digital tools and digital literacy among students. He concluded by stressing that grappling with these challenges is essential for sustaining a democratic historical culture, with history education playing a central role in shaping informed, reflective and responsible citizens.

The workshop discussion highlighted several key takeaways: the need for European-level regulation of AI and digital platforms, the importance of developing AI models and digital tools grounded in European historical, cultural and ethical perspectives rather than purely American or Chinese ones, and the necessity of teaching learners to distinguish between a verifiable "information source" or a "historical source" and an AI-generated response when engaging with digital content.

The opening exchanges referenced the general report from the second Forum, "History education in the digital age",[5] which presented a more optimistic view of digital technologies than the present panel – an intentional effort at the time to counter the prevailing scepticism.

5. See Council of Europe (2024), "History education in the digital age: general report of the *Second Annual Forum for History Education*", Strasbourg, available at https://edoc.coe.int/en/education/11982-history-education-in-the-digital-age-general-report-second-annual-forum-for-history-education.html#.

When asked how they themselves use generative AI, participants described a wide range of applications in their work as teachers and historians. These included drafting funding applications, creating lesson plans, generating questions linked to primary sources and designing roles for historical debates. Others reported using AI for administrative tasks such as diplomatically rephrasing emails or providing feedback on student essays and presentations. AI was also described as a "digital colleague", suggesting new methodologies such as universal design for learning. At the same time, its limitations were highlighted: factual inaccuracies, translation issues and the risk of students submitting AI-generated work – illustrated by one case in which 80 of 120 assignments clearly relied on chatbots.

Concerns quickly turned to the responsible use of AI in education. For students, issues of copyright infringement and plagiarism loomed large, alongside fears that reliance on AI might stifle creativity. Suggestions included oral defences of written work, embedding personal experience in assignments and shifting assessment practices – though participants noted that abandoning written essays altogether would hinder skill development. On the positive side, AI was also viewed as a potential equaliser, offering valuable support to students with additional learning needs.

When asked what support history teachers require, participants emphasised the urgency of clear guidelines for the responsible integration of AI across educational levels, noting that policy making often lags behind rapid technological change. Further, training and professional development were seen as essential, alongside systematic research, including comparative studies on how history students perceive and use AI and its actual impact on history learning. Ethical education was highlighted as well, particularly in addressing the "skilful cheater" and promoting awareness of academic integrity.

Final reflections underscored both the promise and the perils of AI in history education. AI can serve as an assistant, a creative partner, a facilitator of inclusion and even an individually adaptive learning companion, yet it also poses fundamental challenges to authenticity, creativity, responsibility and the very nature of historical learning. Regulation, guidance and, above all, human oversight remain essential – not only to ensure the quality of historical learning but also to safeguard and strengthen a democratic historical culture.

Ethical and practical challenges for history education in the 21st century

In the final plenary session, "Ethical and practical challenges for history education in the 21st century", the first speaker, Antoon De Baets, EuroClio Emeritus Professor of History, Ethics and Human Rights at the University of Groningen, closed the circle to the opening by emphasising the responsibility of historians, the state, society and history educators to ensure a human rights-based history education. He highlighted that history teaching is not only an academic task but also an ethical duty, essential for fostering informed, critical and democratic citizens and for preserving historical truth as a public good. De Baets stressed the risks of manipulating or misusing historical narratives and the role of state authorities in countering such abuses. He underscored how and why history education must promote human rights, uphold democratic values and cultivate civic responsibility, calling on institutions and educators to actively safeguard these principles.

The second speaker, Andrea Pető, Professor of Gender Studies at Central European University, focused on what she termed the "illiberal turn" in history education, or a shift toward more authoritarian approaches to teaching about the past. This encompasses trends such as corporate-style management practices in educational settings that disguise deeper ideological interventions, the use of securitisation logic to monitor and suppress critical examination of historical narratives, and the modification of institutional structures to create conditions conducive to illiberalism. Pető highlighted that the illiberal turn in history teaching represents a fundamental challenge to the principles of academic freedom, critical inquiry and democracy. Her presentation underscored that these implications extend beyond the history classroom to the role of education in democratic societies more largely, threatening the development of thoughtful and critical citizens capable of engaging with complex social and political questions.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the outcomes of the Fourth Forum for History Education, which builds on and reviews many findings from the preceding series, I would like to note the following.

It is urgently necessary that the Council of Europe, building on its successful efforts to strengthen history education across Europe, develops policy papers and guidelines for history teaching in the digital age. These should provide systematic guidance on integrating digital tools and platforms into historical learning, emphasising that historical literacy, critical media literacy and civic responsibility are inseparably linked and must be addressed together. Central to this effort is the need to restore and sustain public trust – both in the problem-solving capacity of democratic institutions and in the reliability of public communication. History education plays a pivotal role here: its connection to identity and collective memory allows students to understand societal narratives, critically evaluate information and develop confidence in

verified knowledge. This trust building is all the more urgent, as the enemies of democracy exploit digital technologies to undermine public confidence – the most vital capital of democratic societies.

Students must understand that user-generated content on social media is largely uncurated, with blurred boundaries between professional and non-professional posts, fact and fiction, opinion and propaganda. They need to grasp the media logics of these platforms, including algorithms that confine learners to echo chambers and filter bubbles. These dynamics contribute to political radicalisation, susceptibility to historical myths and the spread of conspiracy narratives. Social media often present highly fragmented, decontextualised history, governed quantitatively by likes, comments and followers rather than by accuracy or value. Even viewing content can amplify its visibility, highlighting the social responsibility of users.

Digital tools, when thoughtfully integrated, offer immense potential to enhance historical understanding and engagement. Yet without careful guidance, they can exacerbate the very challenges history education seeks to address. Historical literacy, critical media literacy and civic responsibility must form inseparable pillars, providing students with the knowledge, skills and ethical grounding to navigate the online historical landscape responsibly and to rebuild trust in democratic processes.

In classroom strategies, two aspects are particularly important. First, alongside digital media, a defined space must be secured for traditional, face-to-face teaching: discussion, reading, collaborative projects and critical dialogue. Second, non-virtual encounters with the broader institutions of historical culture, such as museums, archives and monuments, must be maintained. Digital strategies must safeguard the role of non-digital experiences while developing integrative approaches that connect digital and traditional learning meaningfully.

While history education alone cannot guarantee democratic development, it plays a crucial role by grounding students in historical truth – not absolute truth, but insights derived through rigorous methodology, intersubjectively verified and endorsed by expert consensus. More than any other subject, history equips learners to recognise and resist misinformation, demonstrating that historical truth is a cornerstone of democracy and a vital public good. It provides a reliable foundation for societal debate, helps orient us in the present and future, and strengthens democratic resilience against manipulation, propaganda and ideological polarisation.

Recommendations

- Develop Council of Europe policy papers and classroom guidelines for historical learning in the digital age.
- Integrate historical literacy, critical media literacy and civic responsibility as inseparable pillars.
- Combine digital tools with traditional face-to-face teaching and non-virtual encounters with historical institutions.
- Equip students to critically navigate social media, recognise misinformation and engage responsibly with historical content.
- Foster trust in democratic institutions and public communication as a central goal of history education.

Opening keynote: reaffirming the role of history education in the 21st century

Niklas Ammert
Pro Vice-Chancellor and Professor of History Didactics and History Education, Linnaeus University

Why is history still relevant? This is a core question, always topical for history didactics scholars as well as for history teachers. From a traditional perspective, the answer would be: of course, history is still relevant because it enriches our lives, because it is a foundation for our identities and for our societies, and because it is an important frame of reference to interpret the past and the present, and to plan for the future. But in 2025 the world is extremely complex and there are several challenges. The geopolitical context has changed with Russia's war against Ukraine and with an insecure and threatened relationship between Europe and the United States of America. A stable world order that characterised our understanding of the present and the past is no longer valid. Besides, there are political leaders who question what has been an established ideal – to honour facts, knowledge and truth. Historical facts are questioned and "alternative facts" are used in order to frame historical contexts. History is used, or abused, as a tool for legitimising a war against a country in Europe.

The American historian Timothy Snyder discusses major historical narratives and uses of the past on a societal level. In his 2018 book *The road to unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America* he states that several countries have switched from one way of relating to history to another during the past 15 years. The years following 1989 and the end of the Cold War in 1991 were characterised by an optimistic view of peace, freedom and democracy, called the politics of inevitability. This view means that it is slowly getting better. Individuals have the choice to affect the future. Now, the optimistic view has changed to the politics of eternity, describing how leaders address historical threats and injustices, stating there have always been enemies threatening the borders. Fear, closure and preparedness for defence have replaced hope, trust and collaboration.

In spite of these challenges or threats, history is not increasingly prioritised in higher education nor at school in most European countries. Accordingly, there is urgent need to reaffirm the role of history education.

History is meaning-making

It is important to keep in mind that history is a part of our everyday lives. We use historical knowledge and references when we constantly try to interpret and understand what is happening in society. International relations and conflicts can be derived from historical contexts that provide tools for interpretation. As individuals, experiences and knowledge are companions in relations with family and friends and in encounters with popular culture, for example films, games, music and literature.

The concept historical consciousness, a central concept in the continental history didactics tradition from the 1970s, is (still) a foundation to describe the meaning-making aspects of history. Historical consciousness is a theoretical concept connecting human beings and their experiences to encounters with history. History is more than the past as just an object to study: it is about connections and interconnections in time, as transtemporal or multichronological (Ammert 2010) orientation. Interpretations of the past are connected to an understanding of the present and perspectives on the future, not in a linear way but as an overarching perspective.

A Swedish teacher expresses her view about what it means to know history and why it is important:

> One has to develop historical understanding in order to understand the present, and also to be able to understand one's future. In order to understand history one must even acquire a consciousness and a historical identity where one can assimilate the historical context and be able to delve in and compare one's own situation with the historical context. (Ammert 2015, p. 91)

Meaning-making interpretations are often catalysed by identification and experiences related to nationality, gender and cultural background, to mention a few. This means that multiperspectivity is important in history teaching. Our classrooms are different from 30 years ago, when I started as a history teacher in secondary school. The students have different backgrounds and experiences. Cultures and people who earlier were regarded as "they" or "them" are now a part of "we" or "us" in our classrooms. Different cultures and especially different historical cultures imply a broadened setting of content. The inclusive perspectives mean that international and global perspectives need to be added to the traditional national perspectives in history education.

Including societal values

Encounters with history and interpretations of history are often framed by values: societal values and moral values. Our perceptions are based on what we consider right or wrong. This does not mean that we should judge the past from a presentist point of view or that we should moralise, but people can never disregard foundational values. They are tools to reflect and make interpretations. The struggle for freedom and democracy has been a driving force and this provides explanations for historical change. Besides, societal and moral values make people interested in and fascinated by history. Values are a sense-making link between the past and the present.

In the international research project Intersections of Historical Consciousness and Moral Consciousness (Ammert et al. 2022) results indicate how students' interest increased and how they expressed a more advanced level of knowledge and competencies when interacting with historical content that included moral values. When students posed questions to a historical context with evident value-based content, their reasoning expressed explanatory and problematising perspectives instead of descriptive views, which was the case when encountering more general content. The meaning-making values increased interest and challenged the students' approach to history.

Societal and moral values are fundamental parts of the historical processes and an interface to students' perceptions and interpretations. It is difficult and often sensitive to discuss difficult pasts in the classroom, but moral values and perspectives are too important to be excluded from history teaching and learning.

What is important to learn?

The meaning-making foundations of history make the subject relevant and interesting to students. History is not just about remembering things. It is important to apply knowledge. In society, references to history are often made and we must be familiar with the references to understand the contexts and the messages. To study and to develop skills to apply history also requires critical thinking and competencies for analysing sources. However, most students will not become historians; they will not study history at university – they will encounter history in their everyday lives. They will be "exposed" to uses of history in different contexts and with different purposes, in computer games, in films, in music and in political contexts. Accordingly, it is important to prepare students for encounters with history.

At school, in history teaching, we must inspire students to develop traditional historical knowledge about central narratives, agents, passages, conflicts and agreements. Besides, it is likely even more important to develop their skills and competencies to decode and interpret uses of history. I would like to stress this: to interpret uses of history is indeed relevant for our students and accordingly for history teaching.

Conclusion

History education is highly relevant in a complex world where facts and knowledge are questioned. Students must be prepared for encounters with uses and abuses of history in their everyday lives and that requires historical content knowledge, critical skills and competencies to decode and interpret uses of history. History is perceived as meaning-making when students find it relevant and especially when societal and moral values such as freedom, democracy, equality and human rights are expressed. In these contexts, moral values function as interfaces between historical time and present time by exposing views of human beings, justice, rights and society. Preparing students to interpret uses of history is crucial in reaffirming the role of history education in the 21st century.

References

Ammert N. (2015), *History as knowledge: ethical values and meaning in encounters with history,* Peter Lang Publishing, Frankfurt am Main and New York.

Ammert N. (2010), "To bridge time: historical consciousness in Swedish history textbooks", *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, Vol. 2(1), pp. 17-30.

Ammert N. et al. (2022), *Historical and moral consciousness in education: learning ethics for democratic citizenship education,* Routledge, London and New York.

Snyder T. (2018), *The road to unfreedom: Russia, Europe, America*, Tim Duggan Books, New York.

Where and how do students meet history? A teacher's perspective

Hendrik Atze van Doezum
Dutch History Teacher of the Year, 2022 and 2023; YouTuber and history teacher, Lauwers College Buitenpost

"I don't like being here". Got your attention, didn't I? Well, it's partially true. I do feel honoured to be here – as a teacher. Nothing more, nothing less. Just a craftsman telling a story. Would I rather be home? Yes – with my wife, whom I married just five weeks ago, and with my students, who today find out if they've passed their exams and earned their diploma. But I'm here. My name is Hendrik Atze van Doezum. I'm a history teacher. In 2022 and 2023, I was named History Teacher of the Year in the Netherlands, but that's a story for another time.

Let me begin with a question: who here enjoys a good story? And what's the best place to hear stories? Anyone thinking of a campfire?

Because when I start teaching history to my 12- and 13-year-old students in their first year of Dutch secondary school, we begin with the dawn of humanity. And we always start at the campfire and the meaning and power that place holds. At the campfire, stories were told, not just to survive the dark night but to pass on knowledge, to shape how people lived together. That's where history begins for my students. And hopefully, after four years, the historical fire is still burning inside them. Because that's what stories do: they spark curiosity. They motivate us to know more. Who hasn't read or heard a story that made them desperate to know what happens next?

Stories bring us together. And history is one of the most important types of stories we share – and pass on.

But something is changing. Stories are no longer told where they once were. Not around the campfire. Not in the church. And in some European countries, including the Netherlands, fewer and fewer in our schools.

Online, stories have become individual, not communal. New groups form around new narratives. The stories that once created social cohesion are being pushed aside by algorithms. Yes, the internet and mainly YouTube is a powerful tool for sharing stories, for engaging students with history and for activating prior knowledge. I use it myself.

But it's also dangerous. Because a story can be a weapon. And without the shield of basic historical knowledge, everyone becomes vulnerable.

That's why we must teach history – not only to learn from it but first to learn it. If we believe that facts matter, then we must also believe that knowledge matters. So let's teach that.

In the 21st century, more and more people encounter history for the first time online – through social media. I still tell stories on YouTube now and then, but the Covid-19 era YouTube teacher I once was is now part of history. But more and more, I've returned to something old fashioned: teaching knowledge face to face. Call me old school, but I write history together with my students.

And as I began, let me end: everyone loves a good story. But online, it's the views that count. So people live by the saying "don't let the facts ruin a good story". Let's make sure we give everyone a strong foundation of knowledge, a shield against that kind of storytelling.

Where and how do students meet history? A learner's perspective

Panagiotis Chatzimichail
Head of External Affairs, Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)

Introduction

As OBESSU, a platform that has advocated for the rights and voices of school students across Europe for 50 years, we are moving towards practices and reforms centred around the learner's experiences and perspectives. Nowadays, we find ourselves at a critical moment for rethinking how we teach, share and live with history.

Representing over 35 national school student unions, our insights are drawn from decades of engagement with young learners, each generation having to navigate a complex and rapidly changing environment.

As part of the Fourth Forum for History Education, our fundamental question was not just where learners meet history, but how they engage with it and how empowered they feel to question, co-create and reimagine its narratives.

The modern landscape of historical encounters

Today's learners encounter history far beyond the confines of the traditional classroom. These encounters occur across a spectrum of formal, non-formal and informal settings.

Formal education remains the primary structured space for learning history. However, school curricula are often perceived by students as rigid, nationalised and in urgent need of decolonisation and diversification.

Through our long-standing advocacy, we see how many students feel about the official curriculum and how it struggles to reflect the diversity of their lived experiences, leading to a sense of alienation from the subject.

Beyond the school gates, non-formal learning environments provide dynamic spaces for historical engagement. Youth-led activities, community projects and online platforms allow for peer-to-peer education on democratic processes, often including the historical context of student movements and youth activism. These spaces foster a sense of ownership and relevance that is sometimes missing from formal education.

Finally, informal learning has become increasingly influential, particularly through digital media. Learners meet history through TikTok videos explaining revolutions, street art echoing past resistance or memorial plaques they pass on a daily walk.

As many of our member unions have highlighted, social media have become a key arena where students debate and interpret history, often outside the control of traditional institutions.

The challenge: whose history gets told?

In an era of overlapping crises, from the rise of disinformation and nationalism to the impacts of war and democratic backsliding, history education must be more than a passive recounting of dates and deeds.

Students are asking critical questions such as "why is my community's history missing from the textbook? Why do certain narratives dominate while others are marginalised? How can I use history to shape a more just future?", yet current educational frameworks often fail to answer.

OBESSU's policy paper on inclusivity within and beyond education[6] documents how curricula frequently exclude or sideline the histories of minority and vulnerable groups. This exclusion is not a neutral act; it reinforces a singular, monolithic narrative of the past.

When history is presented as a closed, unquestionable and institutionally owned subject, learners are discouraged from interrogating or co-authoring it.

During our study session "(de)Grading of Education", students pointed out that traditional assessment methods can further stifle critical engagement by rewarding memorisation over critical analysis.

6. See www.obessu.org/resources/documents/advocacy-work/policy-paper-on-inclusivity-within-and-beyond-education/.

The opportunity: history as a democratic practice

History education needs meaningful transformation, one that goes beyond simply "adding a chapter" on a chosen marginalised group.

If we wish to reclaim its relevance and ability to serve as a pillar of democratic culture, history education must transform into democratic practice. That requires a fundamental shift in approach, such as:

Focus on plurality and agency

Work and learn how to navigate through this condensed and complex field together and how to best integrate the various angles of history. During our study session "Pluriverse – peaceful societies with oppression-free education", for instance, students worked together on how to decolonise and diversify historical narratives. Learners must be given the analytical tools to dissect sources, challenge bias and connect historical events to their lived realities. Giving students a say in what and how history is taught is crucial for fostering this sense of agency.

Participation and co-creation

True inclusion means involving young people in shaping history education itself. This can be achieved through youth councils, the co-creation of educational materials and digital platforms that democratise historical knowledge. OBESSU's conference entitled "Our school is so gay!" highlighted the importance of student participation in advocating for the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and more (LGBTQ+) histories in curricula. Museums, youth organisations and digital content creators must collaborate to help young people make sense of the past in ways that are relevant, critical and empowering. This is where the connection between formal, non-formal and lifelong learning becomes vital. Schools cannot bear this responsibility alone.

A call for systemic change

To defend the relevance of history and strengthen our democratic societies, we call for tangible changes.

Inclusive curricula

We need curricula that are transnational, anti-discriminatory and actively include the histories and perspectives of minority groups such as Roma[7] and LGBTQ+ communities.

Empowered educators

Teacher training must equip educators to navigate sensitive topics, manage multiple narratives and facilitate critical dialogue in the classroom. The Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) provides an excellent foundation for this work.

Support for youth-led initiatives

We must support and fund youth-led projects that use history to combat extremism, foster intercultural understanding and promote active citizenship.

Investment in digital resources

Public investment is needed for accessible, interactive and decolonial digital resources, acknowledging that this is where many learners already meet history. As part of our study session focusing on digital rights, entitled "Cyber activists: understanding digital rights in the artificial intelligence era", young learners and students' representatives underscored the need for digital literacy in historical engagement.

Contemporary connections

Curricula must connect history to current struggles for social and climate justice, reflecting the interconnected realities that young people face.

As OBESSU, we believe that it is best summed up in what a school student shared during one of our consultations: "I don't just want to know what happened. I want to know what it means for me, for others and for the world I'm growing up in".

We must understand that this is a call from a generation ready to learn not just from the past, but with it. A generation ready to defend democracy by understanding the complex stories that shaped it.

Let us ensure, together, that our history education can and will be worthy of that call.

---

7. The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of the terms Roma and/or Travellers.

War in Court: a project of the National Archives of the Netherlands

Tom De Smet
Deputy Director, National Archives of the Netherlands

The War in Court project: aims and challenges

War in Court is a project started in 2022 which is still ongoing. Its purpose is to digitise and offer an online presentation of the Central Archive for Special Jurisdiction (CABR), which was active during the Second World War. The CABR contains more than 350 000 files and 3.8 kilometres of judicial archives. These legal files concern around 425 000 suspects of collaboration with the Germans. It is not only an archive on perpetrators, but also an invaluable source of information on the victims of persecution and on acts of resistance.

The project aims to make the archive accessible for the general public for personal research, such as family history. It should be a tool for citizens in terms of science and education. Relatives of victims have waited for 80 years to finally uncover answers to questions such as: how and why was my relative arrested or deported? Was he or she denounced by someone? What did he or she go through during this time? Who was responsible for his or her death? For society as a whole, this opens the possibility of understanding the emergence of antisemitism and also the different shades of collaboration and other persecutions, for example of LGBTQI or Roma people.

No institution can operate such a project alone or have the expertise on all sources, so it was a joint effort to make the archive public, searchable and contextualised, and to publish sources online.

Several difficulties were foreseen and some were less expected. To make some specialised archives largely open, you need to take into account their complexity, including the vocabulary used. How can we really make the archives accessible through electronic tools? Digitisation of documents also presents well-known technical challenges regarding the quality and preservation of the originals, as well as their readability. The process also allows recognition of names, organisations and locations throughout the texts, and permits connections with other collections.

The whole project was and is built for citizens, to provide them with the tools to think like historians and interpret sources. It can also be used for scholarly research. One of our mantras is: "we will help you to find what you search for and understand what you see".

The project presents the archives as a reflection of legal proceedings, providing both context and guidance for interpreting them.

In terms of access limits, extreme care was taken from an ethical point of view. From the beginning, we involved interest groups in the discussions and the project adopted all their recommendations:

- no files of currently living persons are presented online;
- files cannot be searched for or found via Google;
- contextual information is provided to stimulate social debate;
- certain procedures are implemented for "distressing cases", as the project can have a significant impact on surviving relatives. In such cases, the archives are physically accessible but not online.

Current and future perspectives

War in Court provides numerous new opportunities: analysis of social networks, spatial research based on geography and maps, and macrosocial historical research. Some of these approaches contribute to reflections on the destructive power of bureaucratic institutions, enabling exploration of subjects such as the role of information systems and legislation in the Holocaust, or the question of dispossession of properties owned by victims.

Nevertheless, two months before the project was due to be launched, the privacy authorities indicated that it was too risky: these archives could expose people still alive, even if the information was already accessible in the physical archives. In other words, this situation may be considered acceptable in the physical setting of the archive but is too risky in a digital environment. Consequently, the launch was postponed for one year to review the legal position of the project, including compliance with General Data Protection Regulation. One of the questions that needed clarification by the courts was: does the right to privacy of a few individuals override the right to information of many others? Is the availability of information proportionate, given that it is now 80 years after the events took place?

Adding to this, these debates take place in a tense societal context. Society is polarised and thrives on propaganda and misinformation. Providing reliable sources and contexts for citizens to create their own perspectives is therefore more important than ever. Archives need partners in research and teaching. It is no longer just about explaining the haystack: archives need to provide a magnet for finding the needles citizens are looking for.

War in Court combines collection expertise with new information technology solutions to handle the archive's "megadata". At the beginning, the archive was very disorganised. By contrast, the computer can "know" what belongs together and provide a "perfect" file by recognising where one document ends and another begins. Work is still ongoing to improve facial and handwriting recognition in the documents. The project also aims to provide an automated personalised podcast for users with specific information, as well as automated summaries using AI tools.

In educational terms, much information will be made available online, and the challenge will be to help students contextualise the documents and avoid misconceptions. War in Court has the potential to play a crucial role in bringing the history of the Second World War online for citizens in a society without direct survivors or witnesses. On a social level, within a polarised debate, one central element is to emphasise the important role of archives. In theory, they should be tools for all citizens to understand the past, but sometimes debates are driven by fear, or by the idea that too much openness might open a Pandora's box of "witch hunts".

Nevertheless, all societies need to face the dark pages of their history books and archives are the living memory of them. This is true for the Netherlands and the Second World War, but it is probably the case for many other societies as well. Colonialism also represents dark chapters for several countries, and the challenge of facilitating access to archives on colonisation and decolonisation is a European one. In the near future, public authorities will likely need to address citizens' expectations regarding how to write, teach and construct historical narratives. In this context, archives play a central role in both preserving and providing access to the past. War in Court demonstrates one possible way of addressing such challenges.

Three-point problem: on the role of generative AI in history education and memory

Mykola Makhortykh
Alfred Landauer Lecturer, Institute of Communication and Media Science, University of Bern

The rapid adoption of generative AI models (e.g. GPT or Llama) and applications (e.g. ChatGPT or Gemini) is profoundly transforming different spheres of society. History education and (collective) remembrance are no exceptions, with generative AI being used both by history teachers (Pope and Ma 2024) and history students (Morley 2024), and AI-generated materials about the past flooding online platforms (Sánchez Vera and Graaf (de) 2025). While much remains unclear about the long-term implications of these changes for history learning and history writing, I would like to suggest three points that can serve as a starting point for discussion on how to deal with risks, as well as opportunities, associated with the use of generative AI in the realm of history and memory.

My first point is that generative AI is destroying the way we teach about the past and remember it. While it may sound dramatic, there is evidence that the disruption caused by generative AI will be significant. History education and memory practices have already experienced profound disruptions due to the emergence of digital technology. These disruptions were primarily related to the massive increase in the amount of digitised and digital-born information sources, and the ease of producing the latter and manipulating the former. With human information curation no longer feasible, filtering and retrieving information online increasingly relies on automated systems, many powered by AI. These systems, such as content recommenders and search engines, have become new gatekeepers of information that determine what historical resources and interpretations gain visibility (Makhortykh et al. 2023). Such decisions often follow opaque logic, which can disadvantage educational and heritage institutions that struggle to reach their audiences because automated gatekeepers prefer other types of content and sources optimised for visibility.

The rise of generative AI, however, amplifies these challenges. It risks further limiting the reach of educational and heritage institutions by radically transforming the internet. We are likely to witness the emergence of a new information environment, where users will no longer visit websites beyond a few selected "answer machines" (Joseph 2025) such as ChatGPT or Gemini. This environment prioritises efficiency: why spend time searching for information across multiple websites when a chatbot can summarise information in seconds? Yet this effectiveness comes at the cost of dramatically reducing the user base of platforms that previously served as knowledge repositories in the pre-AI era.

If this challenge alone is not enough, generative AI is likely to contribute to the unprecedented exposure of individuals around the world to false information about the past. There is ample evidence that it multiplies the ability of different groups of actors to distort history, whether in the form of images of Kamala Harris posing with communist symbols (Wells and Cruz 2024) or AI-generated photos from Auschwitz (Wise 2025). What makes this even more complicated is that generative AI does not need extensive prompting to produce fakes. Some of the studies we conducted (e.g. Makhortykh, Vziatysheva and Sydorova 2023) show that AI applications are willing to lie independently, hallucinating historical details, eyewitnesses or even survivor quotes in response to simple historical queries about the Holocaust.

What is even more important, however, is that the adoption of generative AI may have profound implications for the cognitive capacities of those using it. While not all of these implications are negative, there are growing concerns that the use of generative AI may lead to decreased cognitive activity (Kosmyna et al. 2025), which affects engagement with learning tasks and information retention. Together with concerns about the negative impact of generative AI on the development of critical thinking (Singh et al. 2025), this may complicate the process of learning and teaching history.

My second point is that the changes caused by generative AI are unlikely to be reversed, and the AI genie is not going back in the bottle. While there is still a limited number of large-scale empirical studies investigating the use of generative AI in the context of history, some evidence suggests that its use is growing rapidly. A survey we conducted among the adult population in Switzerland highlights that generative AI (together with journalistic media) was the only source of historical information whose use has been growing throughout 2024. According to our findings, the use of generative AI for finding historical information still remains relatively low (7.4% by the end of 2024 for a sample of approximately 1 100 respondents), but it is likely to continue growing, especially considering its intense use among youngsters, in particular students (Freeman 2025).

There are also strong reasons behind the AI genie roaming freely in the foreign country that is history. The ongoing race between major digital service providers, including Alphabet, Meta and Microsoft, to be the first to introduce a new generative AI-powered solution means that users can hardly avoid exposure to generative AI and have to learn how to use it. In the case of history, there are very good reasons for such use: the volume of information about the past keeps growing, and to navigate it more effectively we need more advanced tools, which (surprise!) are increasingly powered by generative AI. Similarly, the growing distribution of AI-made fakes, including fakes dealing with the past, prompts the need for more AI-powered tools to identify and counter them, and generative AI shows substantive promise here (Kuznetsova et al. 2025).

Finally, my last point may sound counterintuitive, considering the rather gloomy picture I outlined above, but I would still suggest that, despite all these challenges, generative AI can help us better learn and teach about the past. While posing many risks, it also allows opportunities, especially if we consider that many of the risks noted above relate to both AI models and applications, and their individual or collective uses being at the pioneering stage. As a result, there is little understanding of how AI tools should be designed and what purposes they should, or should not, be used for. Specifically, there are still few mechanisms to ensure the quality of historical information generated by AI, and even fewer commonly agreed criteria of quality: should it focus on accuracy, respect, diversity or all three?

But how exactly can generative AI help with history learning and history teaching? The possible answers are many. Generative AI enables new modalities through which individuals can learn about history. It not only makes it easier and faster to acquire information in the first place, but also allows us to scrutinise specific details or ask follow-up questions in a way that evokes the talking archives from science fiction. By doing so, it fundamentally transforms existing practices for historical knowledge and memory transmission. Consider, for instance, digital avatars of Holocaust survivors, such as those developed by the Dimensions in Testimony project (Traum et al. 2015). Currently, these avatars are limited in their interaction with users by the selection of pre-recorded questions to which they match user inquiries. However, with the integration of generative AI, these avatars can potentially answer a much broader range of questions and do so in a way that is more similar to engaging with a living survivor than prompting an interface to find a fitting record in its database (Kozlovski and Makhortykh 2025).

Besides, generative AI can help us appreciate institutions that collect and preserve historical knowledge. With the digital memory boom, in which most individuals in the Global North acquired instant access to their own archival devices – sometimes referred to as smartphones – the role of archives became less pronounced. However, the flood of better-than-real images and videos dealing with the historical and recent past emphasises the importance of authentic historical knowledge. When combined with existing archives, for instance via a retrieval-augmented generation technique that allows generative AI models to refer in their responses to authoritative knowledge bases instead of hallucinating non-existent historical details, it can greatly facilitate the use of historical collections and make them unprecedentedly accessible. In a way, generative AI can contribute to MAGA, not in relation to US politics, but in relation to the archive: that is, by making archives great again.

The core question is how to implement these promises. This task is far from simple, as there are many conditions that must be met. First of all, it is crucial to keep reminding different stakeholders – AI developers, users, academics and policy makers – that history and historical education matter. Without making these stakeholders aware that history is not only about past dates or events, but also about present identities and conflicts as well as future decisions, it will be difficult to convince them to invest time (and, importantly, money) in ensuring that generative AI gets its historical facts and interpretations right.

Second, it is essential to create opportunities for stakeholders – including history educators and heritage practitioners – to learn about generative AI and the optimal ways of using (and not using) it. AI literacies cannot emerge by themselves overnight: they have to be nurtured through funding programmes and opportunities for educators to attend them. Without investing in literacies, it will not be possible to comprehensively address the risks of generative AI in distorting the past. There will always be a vulnerability in the system that could enable the production of

more lies and hallucinations, so users must be able to critically assess the capacities of AI and what it produces. Similarly, literacies are essential to inspire and develop better practices for using generative AI in classrooms and heritage institutions.

Third, we need to keep an eye on developments in the field of generative AI and continue monitoring errors and vulnerabilities. History is a complex matter and memory is arguably even more complex. Even if AI were someday to manage both of these complex matters correctly (and we as a community of educators and scholars, as well as citizens, were to univocally agree on what is "right" in this case), the path towards this outcome will not be easy. It is impossible to improve something without trial and error, and there are many technical problems that must be addressed, ranging from random hallucinations to systematic bias. To tackle these problems, there is a need for experts in history who can identify issues and provide recommendations to capture complex nuances.

References

Freeman J. (2025), "Student generative AI survey 2025", Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI), Smart Thinking, available at https://smartthinking.org.uk/report/student-generative-ai-survey-2025/.

Joseph S. (2025), "WTF is 'Google Zero'?", Digiday, available at https://digiday.com/marketing/wtf-is-google-zero/.

Kosmyna N. et al. (2025), "Your brain on ChatGPT: accumulation of cognitive debt when using an AI assistant for essay writing task", available at https://arxiv.org/abs/2506.08872.

Kozlovski A. and Makhortykh M. (2025), "Digital Dybbuks and virtual Golems: the ethics of digital duplicates in Holocaust testimony", *Memory, Mind & Media*, Vol. 4, e10, available at https://resolve.cambridge.org/core/journals/memory-mind-and-media/article/digital-dybbuks-and-virtual-golems-the-ethics-of-digital-duplicates-in-holocaust-testimony/E2028F2B6EEE7E717E0CE18A64C8F0ED.

Kuznetsova E. et al. (2025), "In generative AI we trust: can chatbots effectively verify political information?", *Journal of Computational Social Science*, Vol. 8(1), available at https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42001-024-00338-8.

Makhortykh M. et al. (2023), "Can an algorithm remember the Holocaust? Comparative algorithmic audit of Holocaust-related information on search engines", in Groschek I. and Knoch H. (eds), *Digital Memory: Neue Perspektiven für die Erinnerungsarbeit*, Wallstein Verlag, pp. 79-93.

Makhortykh M., Vziatysheva V. and Sydorova M. (2023), "Generative AI and contestation and instrumentalization of memory about the Holocaust in Ukraine", *Eastern European Holocaust Studies*, Vol. 1(2), pp. 349-355.

Morley N. (2024), "History students' use of Gen-AI", Historical Transactions, available at https://blog.royalhistsoc.org/2024/07/29/history-students-use-of-gen-ai/.

Pope A. and Ma R. (2024), "Exploring historians' critical use of generative AI technologies for history education", *Proceedings of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, Vol. 61(1), pp. 1071-1073.

Sánchez Vera A. and Graaf A. (de) (2025), "The fake Auschwitz images distorting Holocaust history", DW, available at www.dw.com/en/fake-auschwitz-images-shared-online-distort-holocaust-history/video-73443003.

Singh A. et al. (2025), "Protecting human cognition in the age of AI", available at https://arxiv.org/abs/2502.12447.

Traum D. et al. (2015), "New dimensions in testimony: digitally preserving a Holocaust survivor's interactive storytelling", in Schoenau-Fog et al. (eds), *8th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling*, ICIDS, pp. 269-281.

Wells I. and Cruz J. (2024), "Why 'Comrade Kamala' memes are spreading among Latino exiles", BBC News, available at www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8jg11ynj7o.

Wise B. (2025), "Fears history is being rewritten with AI technology", AAP FactCheck, available at www.aap.com.au/factcheck/fears-history-is-being-rewritten-with-ai-technology/.

State obligations in the field of history education

Antoon De Baets
EuroClio Emeritus Professor of History, Ethics and Human Rights, University of Groningen

Introduction

To my knowledge, no research exists on the obligations to which states are bound in the field of history education. The following analysis intends to fill this gap. Generally speaking, states have obligations to individuals living in their territory or under their effective control, to other states and to the international community at large. If, among all these diverse obligations, we want to identify those that are binding for states in the field of history education, we must look for them in human rights treaties. Let me explain this.

Like everyone, individuals involved in the field of history education – students and parents, history teachers and history textbook authors, curriculum developers and inspectors, historical-didactic experts and academics, publishers and so on – have robust human rights, including rights to freedom of opinion and expression. These rights support the free expression of thoughts about the past, regardless of whether the past is conceived as history, memory, tradition or heritage. For the field of history education to flourish, it is vital that all those involved in the field can fully enjoy their human rights. The flagship human rights instruments of the United Nations – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) – contain a catalogue of these rights and directly address states to carry out the obligations necessary to enable their realisation. As these two treaties are ratified by the large majority of states, the latter established their consent to be bound by these obligations.

What, then, are these state obligations? Article 2 of the ICCPR requires states to respect and ensure civil and political rights, adopt laws to give effect to them and provide an effective remedy in case they are violated. Article 2 of the ICESCR requires states to take steps to the maximum of their available resources, with a view to progressively realise economic, social and cultural rights by all appropriate means. Combined, these two articles lead to various types of general state obligations, among which are the state obligations to respect, protect, promote, make reparation and prevent.[8]

Evidently, history education is not mentioned explicitly in the human rights treaties, meaning that any specific state obligations in the field of history education have to be inferred from these general state obligations. This process of inference necessarily involves some degree of interpretation. In order to make our interpretation of treaty law as reliable as possible, tools of soft law developed by the United Nations have been used. In this way, a plausible framework of state obligations in the field of history education can be created. Let us review the five relevant state obligations one by one.

The state obligation to respect

The state obligation to respect regulates the vertical relations between states and the individuals living in their territory or under their effective control. I will apply this obligation first to the opinions, then to the work, of history educators. As a rule, states must respect the freedom of opinion and expression of everyone (including history educators). However, they may sometimes restrict that freedom in the name of a limited set of other rights and interests, namely respect of the rights or reputations of others or the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morals. In the specific field of history education, two of these interests – the right to reputation of others and the interest of public morals – are probably the most sensitive restriction grounds. The former protects the reputations of all persons discussed in research, textbooks and classes; the latter protects the fundamental values of the community, including its younger generations.

8. Note the similarity with the responsibilities of historians, which can be arranged in responsibilities to respect, protect and promote. See De Baets A. (2025), *A human rights view of the past*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 50-55.

However, any state restriction of the opinions of history educators is permissible only if weighed against the freedom of expression of the latter by applying three principles: the principle of legality (is the restriction provided by law?), the principle of legitimacy (does the restriction serve a legitimate interest from the list given above?) and the principle of necessity (is the restriction necessary to protect that interest?).[9] Most notably, the list of rights and interests that are restriction grounds is exhaustive: opinions of history educators may never be restricted on other grounds such as, for example, "in the name of tradition", "in the name of culture", "in the name of national pride" or "in the name of a national symbol". While the regime of permissible restrictions is applicable at all times, states have a larger margin in times of an emergency or war. In these special contexts, they can suppress the opinions of history educators, but only to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation.

When we consider the work of history educators, states must abstain, under the ICCPR, from direct or complicit involvement in attacks on history educators. Under the ICESCR, they must respect the copyright of authors of educational materials, particularly their right to be recognised as creators of their work and their right to object to any mutilation of it. Finally, states must recognise the benefits of international scientific co-operation among history educators.

The state obligation to protect

The state obligation to protect regulates the horizontal relations between individuals. Under the ICCPR, states must protect the expression of opinions by history educators by preventing third parties (individuals as well as groups) from unduly interfering with their opinions or work. This state protection extends to those opinions that are peacefully expressed by history educators in opposition to official memory and history policies and to those that may upset others. States must also create a safe and enabling environment for historical debates among history educators and their students. Finally, they are required to prevent, condemn, prohibit, investigate and prosecute attacks on history educators at risk from third parties.

The state obligation to promote

The state obligation to promote has three layers, namely the promotion of education, science and culture. Under the ICESCR, the state obligation to promote education comprises the obligation to organise primary education that is compulsory and available free to all and to provide secondary and tertiary education by every appropriate means. This general obligation arguably includes the availability and accessibility of history education. Any absence of history education at the primary and secondary levels is unjustifiable. The rare exception to this rule could be its suspension for very brief periods during times of emergency or in societies transitioning toward a democracy and only if it can be convincingly shown that the suspension serves an overriding interest of peace through reconciliation (in other words, if it can be subsumed under the legitimate restriction grounds of public order and/or national security).

The state obligations to promote science and culture imply, among others, that states have the liberty to express their views on history and publish history curricula for schools. Under the ICCPR, however, states must balance their power to promote official historical opinions in their curricula with the right of these educators and students to express their own historical opinions, especially when they deviate from the official ones. If carefully done, the balancing test, already described under the obligation to respect, will fix the extent to which the history outlined in official school curricula and textbooks must be mandatorily taught in the classroom and become the subject of exams, even against the wish of protesting parents. Whatever the outcome, states should not compel educators or students to adopt the official version. Also, under the ICCPR, states should encourage knowledge of the history and traditions of minorities in their territory. Under the ICESCR, the right of everyone to participate in cultural life carries with it the obligation of the state to guarantee educational access to the tangible and intangible cultural heritage within its territory.

The state obligation to make reparation

States must provide an effective remedy and reparation for victims of past human rights violations. If history educators are attacked by third parties, states must offer them an effective remedy and redress for the harm suffered. If societies deal with widespread atrocities from the recent past, several types of reparation are usually distinguished – restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and non-recurrence. Two of these reparation types are particularly relevant for history education: satisfaction (or symbolic reparation) and non-recurrence. Symbolic reparation requires the state to ensure, among others, that an accurate account of past human rights violations is included in educational material at all levels.[10] The United Nations perceives history education as an important tool and it must include the teaching of any recent history of violence, war, conflict and repression. The other reparation type, non-recurrence, can be subsumed under the last obligation, the obligation to prevent.

9. This framework is presented in De Baets (2025), *A human rights view of the past*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 19-23.

10. See A/RES/60/147 (2006), paragraph 22; see also E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1 (2005).

The state obligation to prevent

Under the ICCPR and a host of other international treaties, states must prevent crimes, in particular atrocity crimes – an umbrella term for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The United Nations distinguishes three types of prevention: cessation of conflicts, operational prevention and structural prevention. It has rather frequently emphasised the role of history education in structural prevention (which includes non-recurrence).

Since 2013, an increasing number of United Nations officials and Special Rapporteurs have referred to the causal connection between history education, human rights and prevention of atrocities.[11] I will limit myself here to some insights drawn from two recent reports by United Nations Secretary General António Guterres, the first addressing history education directly, the second indirectly. In a report on transitional justice from 2023, Guterres maintained that transitional justice is fostered by the teaching of history "based on textbooks and curricula that acknowledge the abusive past, encourage critical and multiperspective thinking and affirm a commitment to human rights".[12] In a report on "the responsibility to protect" from 2024, he argued that memorialisation initiatives can counter denial and revisionism and strengthen prevention by educating new generations.[13]

Even the authoritative United Nations General Assembly itself has repeatedly emphasised the role of history education. Since 2019, it has condemned the use of historical myths, recalling in annual resolutions that "education … should include accurate and representative accounts of national history that … expose the untruths of those who attempt to write ethnic groups out of national histories and identities in order to sustain ethnonationalist myths of racially or ethnically 'pure' nations".[14] In 2024, a resolution with this passage was approved with 119 states voting in favour, 53 against and 10 abstaining.

Taken together, these three statements provide a succinct panorama of the United Nations views of the preventive role of history education. Underlying this is an attractive concept of historical truth. When the United Nations refers to this concept, its statements are cautious: rather than telling us positively what historical truth is or should be, it only posits that any truth claim should be based on accurate accounts and on the avoidance of falsification, distortion or denial of the past. In other words, the United Nations uses a formal and minimalist conception of historical truth based on the integrity of individuals invoking it. And so it should be.

Conclusion

The purpose of this contribution was to fill a gap: using the logic of human rights, it tried to infer specific state obligations in the field of history education from general state obligations with the intent to reach broad agreement about them, not merely among history educators but also among outsiders and, importantly, states themselves. Five such state obligations were found to be extremely relevant – the state obligations to respect, protect, promote, make reparation and prevent – and their application in the field of history education was explored. All these state obligations are enforceable, but not to the same degree. Among them the state obligation to respect is the most important. It is immediately applicable and does not require a large dedication of state resources. It is, in fact, an obligation of result that should always be discharged and without which the other obligations become meaningless. The other four obligations, in contrast, are obligations of effort, of means and of conduct, governed by the principle of due diligence (dependent on the state's capacity).

Taken together, the five state obligations can be used for a human rights-based evaluation of state conduct in the field of history education by the state itself, by other states and by civil society organisations, including the international community of history educators. States who ratified the human rights treaties are bound by them when they act as speakers, listeners, funders and arbitrators in the field of history education. They can be reminded of them and held to account if they fail to discharge them. Compliance by the state with its obligations in the field of history education is a precondition for the incubation of critical historical opinions in future generations and for the creation of an enduring democratic culture.

11. See, among others, A/68/296 (2013); A/HRC/28/36 (2014); A/HRC/30/42 (2015); A/72/523 (2017); and A/HRC/37/65 (2018).
12. Quoted in "Guidance note of the Secretary General on transitional justice: a strategic tool for people, prevention and peace" (2023), United Nations, New York, p. 20.
13. See A/78/901–S/2024/434 (2024), paragraph 37.
14. Quoted in A/RES/79/160 (2024), paragraph 25.

The illiberal turn in history teaching: mechanisms and agents of the transformation

Andrea Pető
Historian and Professor of Gender Studies, Central European University

Introduction

Educational systems worldwide are undergoing what researchers describe as a shift toward more authoritarian approaches to history instruction, where majority viewpoints are prioritised over individual rights and diverse perspectives. The illiberal turn in history education has cultivated an environment in which traditional historical narratives prevail and state-sanctioned canonised views prevail over critical inquiry. The "turn" thus presents itself as an alternative to liberal democracy, not by rejecting democratic principles outright but by reinterpreting and instrumentalising them through a lens that prioritises majority rule, national identity and traditional values over individual rights and pluralism. As states finance educational institutions with quality assurance mechanisms, state capture by illiberal actors significantly impacts the content, process and quality of history teaching. The illiberal turn manifests through sophisticated mechanisms that operate simultaneously at institutional, epistemological and ideological levels, fundamentally altering how historical knowledge is produced, transmitted and legitimised within educational contexts.

This text examines three interconnected elements that constitute the architecture of illiberal transformation in history teaching: new managerialism as a vehicle for ideological instrumentalisation, securitisation of historical narratives and the dual strategy of institutional transformation coupled with epistemological shift. These elements work in concert to reshape the landscape of historical education, moving it away from principles of academic freedom and critical inquiry toward more controlled politically aligned forms of knowledge production.

Characteristics of the illiberal transformation

New managerialism

New managerialism in educational contexts represents a paradigm shift from traditional academic governance toward corporate-style management practices prioritising efficiency, measurability and strategic alignment with broader organisational objectives. Within history teaching, this transformation manifests as the systematic instrumentalisation of pedagogical language and educational tools to serve dual purposes: advancing specific ideological agendas while pursuing financial optimisation.

The managerial approach to history education deploys seemingly neutral administrative mechanisms that mask deeper ideological interventions. Curriculum standards, learning objectives and assessment criteria are reformulated using managerial discourse that emphasises "outcomes", "deliverables" and "performance indicators". Teachers are expected to submit their "portfolios" for assessment. This linguistic transformation depoliticises inherently political decisions about historical content, making ideological choices appear as technical administrative matters.

Financial incentives become powerful tools for shaping historical narratives. Educational institutions, increasingly dependent on external funding sources, are subject to performance metrics that indirectly influence curricular content. Grant requirements, funding formulas and resource allocation mechanisms create economic pressures that encourage alignment with historical interpretations or national narratives. Publishers of textbooks and educational materials, driven by their financial interests, respond to these market signals by producing content that meets the implicit ideological requirements embedded within managerial frameworks, applying self-censorship.

The instrumentalisation extends to professional development programmes, teacher evaluation systems and academic promotion criteria. Educators navigate a system where career advancement depends on demonstrating alignment with managerial objectives that often include specific approaches to historical interpretation. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle where the profession gradually selects for individuals willing to operate within these constraints, further embedding illiberal practices within the educational system.

Securitisation

The securitisation of history teaching represents how historical narratives become framed as matters of national security, social stability or civilisational survival. This transformation elevates certain historical interpretations beyond academic debate, positioning them as essential components of collective security that require protection from challenge or revision.

Securitisation identifies existential threats to national identity, social cohesion or cultural continuity that supposedly emanate from particular historical interpretations or pedagogical approaches. Alternative historical narratives are characterised as academically incorrect and dangerous to the social order. This framing justifies exceptional measures to control historical education, including legislative interventions, regulatory oversight and direct state involvement in curricular decisions.

The process involves the construction of historical orthodoxies that serve as bulwarks against perceived threats. These orthodoxies typically emphasise national greatness, cultural superiority or historical victimisation narratives that position the nation or group as fundamentally righteous in its historical trajectory. Critical examination of these narratives becomes reframed as an act of betrayal or subversion rather than scholarly inquiry.

Securitisation also manifests through the creation of monitoring mechanisms designed to identify and suppress unacceptable historical interpretations. Educational institutions may implement reporting systems, establish oversight committees or deploy surveillance technologies to ensure compliance with approved historical narratives. Teachers and students become scrutinised for expressions of historical perspectives diverging from securitised orthodoxies.

The logic of securitisation creates a climate of fear and self-censorship within educational institutions. The threat of professional consequences, legal action or social ostracism encourages conformity to approved historical interpretations. This environment undermines the fundamental conditions necessary for critical historical inquiry, transforming classrooms from spaces of intellectual exploration into sites of ideological reproduction.

Dual strategy: institutional transformation together with epistemological shift

The illiberal turn in history teaching operates through a sophisticated dual strategy that simultaneously transforms institutional structures and epistemological foundations. This approach recognises that sustainable ideological change requires external pressure through institutional mechanisms and internal transformation of how knowledge is conceived and validated.

Institutional transformation involves systematically modifying educational governance structures, funding mechanisms and regulatory frameworks to create conditions conducive to illiberal practices. This includes establishing centralised curriculum authorities with enhanced powers to dictate historical content, creating accountability systems that incentivise conformity to approved narratives and implementing legal or regulatory restrictions on specific historical inquiry or interpretation forms.

The institutional dimension also encompasses changes to teacher preparation programmes, professional development requirements and certification processes. These modifications ensure that future educators are trained within frameworks that normalise illiberal approaches to historical education. Similarly, textbook approval processes, library acquisition policies and digital learning platform selections become sites of institutional control over historical knowledge.

Parallel to these institutional changes, an epistemological shift occurs in how historical knowledge is understood and legitimised. Traditional commitments to evidence-based inquiry, methodological rigour and interpretive pluralism give way to approaches prioritising narrative coherence, emotional resonance and ideological alignment. Historical truth becomes subordinated to the instrumentalisation of history, with the value of historical knowledge measured by its contribution to desired social or political outcomes rather than its correspondence to evidence.

This epistemological transformation often involves elevating particular forms of evidence or interpretive frameworks while marginalising others. Oral traditions, personal testimonies or cultural narratives may be privileged over documentary evidence or comparative analysis. Alternatively, specific archival sources may be deemed more authentic or valuable than others based on their alignment with preferred ideologically driven interpretations.

The dual strategy creates mutually reinforcing dynamics where institutional pressures support epistemological changes while new approaches to historical knowledge justify institutional interventions. This creates a feedback loop that progressively normalises illiberal practices, making them appear as "natural" or inevitable developments rather than deliberate political choices.

Mechanisms of implementation: how does the illiberal turn happen?

The illiberal turn does not occur through sudden revolutionary change but rather through the systematic deployment of specific strategies that gradually reshape the landscape of historical education. These implementation mechanisms operate across multiple domains simultaneously, creating a comprehensive

transformation that affects funding structures, institutional hierarchies, religious-secular balances, research infrastructure and gender narratives.

Financial disparities as tools of control

Financial disparities are perhaps the most effective mechanism for implementing illiberal changes in history teaching. The strategic distribution of educational resources creates powerful incentives for institutional compliance while undermining resistant institutions' capacity to maintain alternative approaches to historical education.

This process operates through the systematic underfunding of public educational institutions that maintain commitments to liberal democratic principles of historical inquiry. Budget cuts reduce per-student funding and the elimination of discretionary spending creates conditions of resource scarcity that make institutions vulnerable to external influence. When faced with financial constraints, educational institutions become more willing to accept funding sources with implicit or explicit requirements regarding historical content and pedagogical approaches.

Simultaneously, institutions that demonstrate alignment with ideologically driven historical narratives receive preferential treatment in funding allocations. This may manifest through special grants, enhanced per-student funding, infrastructure investments or access to additional resources. The differential treatment creates a two-tiered system where compliance with illiberal approaches becomes economically advantageous while maintaining liberal democratic principles becomes financially unsustainable.

The financial mechanism extends to individual educators through salary disparities, research funding opportunities and career advancement prospects. Teachers and researchers who embrace approved historical narratives find themselves with access to better compensation, professional development opportunities and institutional support. This creates professional incentives that encourage conformity while discouraging dissent, gradually transforming the composition of the educational workforce.

Hijacking quality assurance mechanisms

Quality assurance systems, designed initially to maintain educational standards and ensure academic integrity, become powerful tools for implementing illiberal changes when captured by ideologically motivated actors. The hijacking of these mechanisms represents a particularly insidious form of transformation because it maintains the appearance of neutral, technical evaluation while serving partisan political purposes.

Accreditation processes become vehicles for enforcing ideological conformity. Accrediting bodies modify their evaluation criteria to include requirements that effectively mandate particular approaches to historical interpretation. Institutions seeking accreditation or reaccreditation must demonstrate alignment with these requirements, regardless of their academic merit or pedagogical effectiveness. The threat of losing accreditation creates powerful incentives for compliance, as unaccredited institutions face severe consequences, including loss of funding, inability to grant recognised degrees and professional delegitimisation.

Curriculum review processes similarly become instruments of ideological control. External reviewers, appointed through politically influenced selection processes, evaluate historical curricula based on criteria prioritising narrative coherence and political alignment over scholarly rigour or methodological sophistication. These reviews result in requirements for curricular modifications that gradually shift educational content toward approved interpretations.

Assessment and evaluation systems undergo modification to reinforce preferred historical narratives. Standardised tests, graduation requirements and performance metrics are designed to reward student mastery of historical interpretations while penalising critical thinking or alternative perspectives. This creates feedback loops where teachers modify their instruction to align with assessment requirements, further embedding illiberal approaches within classroom practice.

De-secularisation of public education

The de-secularisation of public educational systems creates parallel structures that benefit from implementing illiberal historical education. Religious schools and institutions receive preferential treatment that enables them to serve as laboratories for illiberal approaches while providing attractive alternatives to traditional secular education.

Religious educational institutions maintain greater autonomy in curricular decisions, allowing them to implement historical narratives that align with broader ideological projects without facing the same regulatory constraints as secular institutions. This autonomy extends to hiring practices, pedagogical approaches and content selection, creating environments where illiberal historical education can flourish without external interference.

Financial advantages compound this autonomy through preferential funding arrangements. Religious schools often receive public funding while maintaining their independence from secular oversight mechanisms. This creates economic incentives for families to choose religious education, gradually shifting enrolment patterns away from secular institutions toward those more amenable to illiberal approaches.

Working conditions in religious educational institutions frequently surpass those in secular counterparts.

Teachers in religious schools enjoy better compensation, smaller class sizes, enhanced professional support and greater job security. These advantages attract talented educators who might otherwise resist illiberal approaches, creating a brain drain from secular institutions while building capacity within religious educational structures.

The preferential treatment of religious institutions serves broader strategic purposes by normalising the integration of religious and political narratives within historical education. This creates precedents for ideological influence within educational systems while providing models for illiberal approaches that can subsequently be adapted for secular contexts.

The "herstory" turn

The transformation of gender narratives within historical education represents both a mechanism for implementing illiberal changes and a site of contestation between different ideological projects. The so-called "herstory" turn illustrates how ostensibly progressive educational reforms can serve broader illiberal purposes while creating new forms of orthodoxy that constrain historical inquiry.

Traditional historical narratives emphasising political, military and economic developments dominated by male actors face challenges from approaches prioritising women's experiences, gender relations and feminist perspectives. While this shift initially emerged from legitimate scholarly concerns about historical exclusion and bias, it becomes instrumentalised within illiberal frameworks to serve broader ideological purposes.

The emphasis on gender narratives creates opportunities for political actors to demonstrate progressive credentials while advancing conservative social agendas. By promoting particular interpretations of women's historical roles that emphasise traditional family structures, religious values or national identity, educational systems can appear responsive to feminist concerns while reinforcing conventional gender hierarchies.

The "herstory" turn also serves as a mechanism for displacing traditional liberal democratic narratives emphasising individual rights, political participation and social progress. By reframing historical questions around gender identity and cultural representation, educational systems can avoid discussing broader questions about power, inequality and social change that might challenge existing political arrangements.

This transformation creates new forms of historical orthodoxy that constrain scholarly inquiry differently. Teachers and students navigate competing requirements to acknowledge women's historical experiences while conforming to approved interpretations of gender roles and social relations. The result is a form of historical education that appears progressive while serving fundamentally conservative purposes.

Conclusion

The illiberal turn in history teaching represents a fundamental challenge to the principles of academic freedom, critical inquiry and democratic education. Through new managerialism, securitisation and the dual institutional-epistemological transformation, historical education becomes instrumentalised for political and economic purposes that extend far beyond the traditional goals of historical understanding.

Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for educators, policy makers and citizens concerned with preserving the integrity of historical education in Europe and beyond. The illiberal transformation often occurs gradually through seemingly neutral administrative or pedagogical changes. Recognising these patterns enables more effective resistance to eroding liberal democratic values within educational institutions.

The stakes of this struggle extend beyond the classroom to encompass broader questions about the role of education in democratic societies. History education is crucial for forming critical citizens capable of engaging with complex social and political questions. The illiberal turn threatens to transform this educational function into a mechanism for producing compliant subjects rather than thoughtful citizens, with profound implications for the future of democratic governance.

Further reading

Dillabough J.-A. and Pető A. (2024), "Universities in the 21st century: a new battlescape over 'public things' and our commonworld", *Internationalisation of Higher Education – Policy and Practice*, Vol. 3, pp. 19-33.

Pető A. (2017), "Revisionist histories, 'future memories': far-right memorialization practices in Hungary", *European Politics and Society*, Vol. 1, pp. 41-51, available at https://research.ceu.edu/en/publications/revisionist-histories-future-memories-far-right-memorialization-p/.

Pető A. (2017), "Roots of illiberal memory politics: remembering women in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution", *Baltic Worlds*, Vol. 10(4), pp. 42-58, available at www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/72894.

Pető A. (2021), "Paradigm change in Holocaust remembrance. Instrumentalising conservatism", in Miklossy K. and Kangaspuro M. (eds), *Conservatism and Memory Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe*, Routledge, pp. 160-173, available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4080288.

Pető A. (2021), "The illiberal memory politics in Hungary", *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 24(2), pp. 241-249, available at www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623528.2021.1968150.

Multiperspectivity in remembrance and history education for democratic citizenship

Luz Martínez Seijo
Chair, Sub-Committee on Culture, Education and Democratic Values, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and PACE rapporteur on "Multiperspectivity in remembrance and history education for democratic citizenship"

Introduction: history education for democratic citizenship

The report explores how history education and collective memory can be leveraged to strengthen democratic citizenship in increasingly diverse and polarised European societies. It argues that history should not be taught as a static list of facts but as a dynamic tool for critical thinking, empathy and civic engagement. A multiperspectival approach – one that includes diverse narratives and encourages critical analysis – is essential for fostering democratic values, human rights and social cohesion.

However, the report identifies several barriers: rigid curricula, outdated teaching methods, lack of teacher training and societal resistance to confronting controversial histories. These challenges hinder the development of students' ability to engage critically with the past and understand its relevance to present-day democratic life.

Key themes and challenges

Democratic citizenship education

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) is highlighted as a foundational model. It promotes skills such as cultural sensitivity, critical self-awareness and respect for diversity. Yet structural issues such as overloaded curricula and insufficient teacher preparation limit the integration of democratic citizenship education in schools.

Teaching difficult histories

Addressing sensitive topics such as genocide, war and authoritarian regimes is crucial for promoting tolerance and understanding. The report stresses the importance of distinguishing between memory (subjective, collective) and history (evidence-based, analytical). Educators must help students navigate these complexities to foster empathy and critical engagement.

Memory as a democratic tool

Memory, when critically examined, can support reconciliation and prevent the repetition of past atrocities. The Holocaust is cited as a key example of how remembrance can be used to teach human rights. However, the report warns against the politicisation or distortion of memory for ideological purposes.

Bridging formal and non-formal education

The report advocates for stronger collaboration between schools and cultural institutions. Non-formal education, such as visits to museums, memorials and historical sites, offers immersive learning experiences that deepen students' understanding of history and its contemporary relevance.

Examples include:

- remembrance sites: Holocaust memorials, Srebrenica, Spanish Civil War mass graves;
- museums: Sybir Memorial Museum (Poland), House of Leaves (Albania), War Childhood Museum (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and others;
- Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: ATRIUM, European Route of Jewish Heritage, Liberation Route Europe, etc.;
- networks: the European Network Remembrance and Solidarity fosters cross-border dialogue and partnerships.

Case study: Spain and Navarra

Spain's efforts to integrate historical memory into education, especially regarding the Civil War and Franco's dictatorship, are presented as a model. Legislative measures like the Democratic Memory Law and the Organic Law on Education (3/2020) aim to embed civic and ethical values into curricula.

Navarra's Schools with Memory programme exemplifies best practices, combining teacher training, student engagement and remembrance site visits. These initiatives promote reconciliation and a deeper understanding of historical injustices.

Multiperspective history education

A central recommendation is the adoption of multiperspectival methodologies. These approaches encourage students to explore diverse narratives, question dominant interpretations and understand the complexity of historical events. The report also introduces the concept of the "null curriculum" – topics that are omitted from teaching which can send implicit messages about what is valued or ignored.

Recommendations and future directions

The report outlines several proposals:

- curriculum reform: introduce flexible, competence-based curricula that prioritise critical thinking and democratic values;
- teacher training: embed the RFCDC into teacher education and provide tools for addressing sensitive topics;
- interactive pedagogies: use participatory methods that reflect students' diverse identities;
- collaborative projects: partner with museums, non-governmental organisations and artists to co-create engaging history lessons;
- support for non-formal education: ensure funding and autonomy for cultural institutions to act as "safe spaces for democracy".

Conclusion

The report concludes that history education is a powerful tool for defending democracy, promoting human rights and fostering social cohesion. It calls for continued investment in remembrance education, heritage preservation and interdisciplinary collaboration. By connecting the past with present challenges, educators can prepare students to become active, empathetic and informed citizens.

The full PACE report "Multiperspectivity in remembrance and history education for democratic citizenship" (Doc. 16090) by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media is available at: https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=33942&lang=en.

Appendix 1 – Forum programme

DAY 1

11 JUNE 2025

Moderator

Bálint Molnár

Executive Director, European Youth Centre Budapest, Council of Europe

17:00 – 17:30	**OFFICIAL OPENING** **Welcome remarks** **Matjaž Gruden** Director for Democracy, Council of Europe **Overview of Forum programme** **Jean-Philippe Restoueix** Head of Unit, Remembrance and Intergovernmental Programme on History Education, Council of Europe
17:30 – 18:30	**KEYNOTE SPEECH AND PLENARY DEBATE** **Reaffirming the role of history education in the 21st century** **Niklas Ammert** Pro Vice-Chancellor and Professor of History Didactics and History Education, Linnaeus University *Why is history still relevant in the 21st century? What are the roles of institutions and individuals in upholding our memory of the past? How can we respond to challenges to history in our contemporary societies?* *With his expertise on how people encounter, interpret and use history in different societal contexts, Niklas Ammert will discuss the diverse ways in which these questions have been dealt with, as well as the challenges posed by the current geopolitical environment. He will reflect on the intersection between history, historical consciousness and moral values, as well as the importance of life experiences and knowledge in meaning making in history. In the plenary discussion, participants will be invited to debate the role that history education should play in the 21st century, setting the stage for further discussions throughout the Forum.*
18:30	**Joint dinner**

DAY 2

12 JUNE 2025

	PANEL 1: WHERE AND HOW DO LEARNERS MEET HISTORY? *We all meet history in different ways: as a school student in a classroom lesson, as a tourist at a museum or memorial, as a pedestrian encountering the name of a street on a sign… How might we recognise the spaces in which learners come together with history? And how might we support them in their engagement with the past?* *Drawing from their diverse backgrounds, the speakers on this panel will address the manifold contexts in which learners connect with history today, ranging from formal education and textbooks to memorial sites and digital media. In doing so, they will explore the evolving but enduring role that history plays in the 21st century and discuss strategies for defending its relevance to building and maintaining democratic culture. Participants will be asked to reflect on the conditions needed to shape an inclusive history education, considering a lifelong learning perspective that recognises the links and tensions between different contexts, whether traditional and non-traditional formats or formal and non-formal education.*	
9:00 – 10:30	**Moderator** **Andreas Holtberget** Project manager, EuroClio – European Association of History Educators **Learners' representative** **Panagiotis Chatzimichail** Head of External Affairs, Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBSESSU)	**Speakers** **Hendrik Atze van Doezum** History teacher and YouTuber, Buitenpost **Inês Fialho Brandão** Head of Cultural and Digital Mediation, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon and member of the Scientific Advisory Council, Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, Council of Europe **Aleksandar Todosijević** History teacher, textbook author and President, UDI-EuroClio Serbia
10:30 – 11:00	**Coffee break**	
11:00 – 12:30	**WORKING GROUPS** *Participants will divide into three working groups, each moderated by a member of the Forum preparatory team and joined by a speaker from Panel 1. In the session, they will have an in-depth discussion on the issues raised during the panel, with the opportunity to ask questions and exchange experiences. One group rapporteur per working group will take notes on the main outcomes of the session and communicate these to the General Rapporteur.*	
12:30 – 14:00	**Lunch**	

	PANEL 2: HISTORY EDUCATION AND THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES *In 2025, there is no doubt that many learners meet history through digital media. The rapid evolution of new technologies has a direct impact on how history is transmitted and perceived, bringing with it both opportunities, such as increased access to information, as well as challenges, such as the spread of disinformation and manipulated historical content.* *During this panel, speakers will take stock of developments like social media and artificial intelligence and consider how these have shaped domains from formal education to public archives. They will further reflect on and provide perspectives for the future of teaching and learning history in light of the changing tools and methods available to learners. Participants will be invited to discuss the innovations and frameworks that are needed to ensure quality history education in the contemporary digital age.*
14:00 – 15:30	**Moderator** **Monika Lendermann** Project officer, Intergovernmental Programme on History Education and Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, Council of Europe **Learners' representative** **Luka Lešić** Equality co-ordinator, European Students' Union and student, University of Zadar **Speakers** Tom De Smet Deputy Director, National Archives of the Netherlands **Sophie Gebeil** Lecturer in contemporary and media history, Aix-Marseille University **Mykola Makhortykh** Lecturer, Institute of Communication and Media Science, University of Bern
15:30 – 16:00	**Coffee break**
16:00 – 17:30	**WORKING GROUPS** *Participants will divide into three working groups, each moderated by a member of the Forum preparatory team and joined by a speaker from Panel 2. In the session, they will have an in-depth discussion on the issues raised during the panel, with the opportunity to ask questions and exchange experiences. One group rapporteur per working group will take notes on the main outcomes of the session and communicate these to the General Rapporteur.*
17.30 – 18.30	**Working meeting between group rapporteurs and General Rapporteur**
19:30	**Joint dinner**

DAY 3

13 JUNE 2025

Moderator

Raul Cârstocea

Chair ad interim, Scientific Advisory Council, Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, Council of Europe and Professor of History, Maynooth University

Time	Session
9:00 – 9:30	**FEEDBACK FROM THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE PREVIOUS DAY'S WORKING GROUPS** **Susanne Popp** Honorary President, International Society for History Didactics
	PLENARY DIALOGUE AND DEBATE **Ethical and practical challenges for history education in the 21st century** *This closing session brings together the various topics debated throughout the Forum by concentrating on actions and obligations. Each speaker will first contribute an analysis of the role of institutions in relation to history and memory, taking into account different political environments and human rights perspectives.* *In the plenary debate, the speakers and participants will engage in a dialogue focusing on the future. In discussing what history education might look like in the 21st century, they will reflect on what institutions, civil society and individuals can and should do, in light of both ethical and practical considerations, to reaffirm the democratic mission of history education.*
9:30 – 11:00	**Speakers** **Antoon de Baets** EuroClio Emeritus Professor of History, Ethics and Human Rights, University of Groningen **Andrea Pető** Historian and Professor of Gender Studies, Central European University
11:00 – 11:30	**Coffee break**
11:30 – 12:30	**GENERAL RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT AND REFLECTIONS**
12:30 – 13:00	**CLOSING REMARKS** **Luz Martínez Seijo** Chair, Sub-Committee on Culture, Education and Democratic Values, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and PACE rapporteur, "Multiperspectivity in remembrance and history education for democratic citizenship" **Jean-Philippe Restoueix** Head of Unit, Remembrance and Intergovernmental Programme on History Education, Council of Europe
13:00 – 14:00	**Lunch**

Appendix 2 – List of participants

Last name	First name	Title	Organisation
Aktekin	Semih	Rector	Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University
Ammert	Niklas	Pro Vice-Chancellor and Professor of History Didactics and History Education	Linnaeus University
Atze van Doezum	Hendrik	History teacher	Lauwers College Buitenpost
Bencze	Norbert	Secretary	Eurodoc
Bibileishvili	Irina	Founder and Director	Museum of History of the Jews of Georgia and Georgian-Jewish Relations
Carbonaro	Sergio	Research and Policy Officer	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
Cârstocea	Raul	Chair ad interim, Scientific Advisory Council	Observatory on History Teaching in Europe, Council of Europe
Cavalli	Monica	Expert	Department of Education and Culture, San Marino
Chapman	Arthur	Professor of History Education	University College London
Chatzimichail	Panagiotis	Head of External Affairs	Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU)
Davieau	Nicolas	Education Officer for History-Geography and Moral and Civic Education	Ministry of National Education and Youth, France
De Baets	Antoon	EuroClio Emeritus Professor of History, Ethics and Human Rights	University of Groningen
De Smet	Tom	Deputy Director	National Archives of the Netherlands

Last name	First name	Title	Organisation
Demaria	Cristina	Professor of Philosophy and Theories of Languages and Rector's Delegate for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion of Alma Mater	University of Bologna
Dika	Drini	Adviser for Education and Science	Bureau for Development of Education, North Macedonia
Dos Santos Lourenço Pereira	Maria Paula	Expert	Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Portugal
Dujković-Blagojević	Bojana	History teacher	EuroClio
Dumitru	Irina-Mihaela	Open Science Working Group Co-ordinator	Eurodoc
Fialho Brandão	Inês	Head of Cultural and Digital Mediation	Calouste Gulbenkian Museum Lisbon
Gargioni	Stefania	History teacher	EuroClio
Gautschi	Peter	Professor of History Education	University of Teacher Education Lucerne
Gebeil	Sophie	Lecturer in Contemporary and Media History	Aix-Marseille University
Gestsdóttir	Súsanna Margrét	Assistant Professor of Education	School of Education, University of Iceland
Giannou	Vassiliki	History teacher	EuroClio
Gruden	Matjaž	Director for Democracy	Directorate for Democracy, Council of Europe
Harmaňošová	Mária	Expert	National Institute of Education and Youth, Slovak Republic
Holtberget	Andreas	Project Manager	EuroClio
Kajaia	Kristine	Project Assistant	Intergovernmental Programme on History Education, Council of Europe
Kauppinen	Jorma	Counsellor for Education	Finnish National Agency for Education
Kostić	Nataša	History teacher	UDI-EuroClio Serbia
Lamikiz Jauregiondo	Amaia	History teacher	EuroClio

Last name	First name	Title	Organisation
Lendermann	Monika	Project Officer	Intergovernmental Programme on History Education, Council of Europe
Lešić	Luka	Equality Co-ordinator	European Students' Union
Lock	David	Secretary General	Magna Charta Observatory
Lutter Andrásné Hegedűs	Ildikó	History and English teacher	EuroClio
Makhortykh	Mykola	Alfred Landauer Lecturer	Institute of Communication and Media Science, University of Bern
Marschnig	Georg	Professor of History Didactics	University of Vienna
Martínez Seijo	María Luz	Chair of the Sub-Committee on Culture, Education and Democratic Values	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
Mkrtchyan	Lilit	Deputy Executive Director	National Centre for Educational Development and Innovations Foundation, Yerevan
Molnár	Bálint	Executive Director	European Youth Centre Budapest
Moreno Vera	Juan Ramón	Professor of Social Sciences Education	University of Murcia
Naudžiūnienė	Akvilė	Assistant Professor of History	Vilnius University
Oja	Mare	Chief Expert for Social Studies	Ministry of Education and Research, Estonia
Patriarca	Giovanni	Official	Dicastery for Culture and Education, Holy See
Pavelieva	Anna	External Communications Co-ordinator	Eurodoc
Pető	Andrea	Historian and Professor of Gender Studies	Central European University Vienna
Popescu	Mirela	Adviser	National Centre for Curriculum and Evaluation, Romania
Popp	Susanne	Honorary President	International Society for History Didactics

Last name	First name	Title	Organisation
Restoueix	Jean-Philippe	Head of Unit	Intergovernmental Programme on History Education, Council of Europe
Saugmann	Pil Maria	President	Eurodoc
Shkabko	Serhii	Head of Expert Group for European Integration	Ministry of Education and Science, Ukraine
Staniszewski	Jacek	History teacher	EuroClio
Szentirmai	Dóra	Senior Counsellor	Ministry of Culture and Innovation, Hungary
Todosijević	Aleksandar	President	UDI-EuroClio Serbia
Tóth	Judit	Doctoral candidate at the University of Pécs	Eurodoc
Tuite	Marie-Claire	President	History Teachers' Association of Ireland
Van Brussel	Stefanie	History teacher	EuroClio
Van Dalen	Alice	Co-ordinator for History and Memory	Wallonia-Brussels Federation
Vukanović	Miloš	Assistant Professor	University of Donja Gorica
Wibacke	Elis	Doctoral candidate at Linköping University	Eurodoc
Wuyts	Melanie	Project Co-ordinator	Flemish Ministry of Education and Training

As part of the intergovernmental programme on history education, the Education Department of the Council of Europe has launched a series of forums on key topics concerning history in the first quarter of the 21st century. The fourth forum was entitled "Where learners meet history: reaffirming the role of history education in the 21st century" and took place at the European Youth Centre Budapest in June 2025.

Discussions centered on the role of learners, examining the spaces and conditions in which they engage with history as well as the challenges they face. Participants explored a diverse range of topics, including textbooks and other educational resources, museum learning, digital literacy, archives and artificial intelligence. Keynote contributions addressed the distortion of historical narratives and the spread of disinformation in the context of a resurgence of nationalism and extremism, as well as the obligations of states and public authorities to protect and promote academic freedom, international co-operation and multiperspectival approaches to history education.

As we look forward into the 21st century, along with the challenges and opportunities it brings for Europe and the world, the forum reaffirmed history teaching and learning as an integral cornerstone of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The present report is a testament to the enduring importance of history education for fostering peace and mutual understanding in Europe.

PREMS 129525

ENG

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE