

EUSTORY Charter

EUSTORY is an informal network of non-governmental organisations carrying out historical research competitions for young people in Europe.

Historiography, history teaching and the general perception of history have played various roles during the past. They have contributed to:

- collective and individual memories and senses of belonging
- perceptions of the present and the future
- cultural enrichment

But they also played a part in:

- developing exclusive and assumed superior identities by various groups
- creating hate between nations, ethnic, social, political and religious groups
- justifying policies leading to discrimination, persecution, conflicts and wars

These examples show the importance of history in peoples' lives.

Consequently, we - the founders, members and supporters of EUSTORY - have agreed on the following principles. These shall constitute a Charter that shall guide us in our work. Our Charter is also addressed to people involved in education, science, culture, economy and politics in Europe.

1. A European Perspective in our various histories

We live in a changing world, which requires a new awareness of history. The ideological divisions in Europe of the 20th century are disappearing. People move more and more. Cultural and economic exchanges are growing. The revolution in information technology makes communication across borders easy. The greater coherence and enlargement of the European Union challenges the traditional nation-state and raises the question of new identities.

We in EUSTORY are concerned with the importance of history in these processes. We aim at an European approach towards history which should overcome discourses of exclusiveness, concentrated on self-pride and self-pity. We intend to listen to others and to tell our stories in a way which makes them understandable and easier to accept for people from diverse backgrounds.

Overcoming exclusiveness also means that our notion of European history is not aimed against any other part of the world. It is obvious that European history is much more

than the history of the European Union, but includes the study of a much wider range of historical aspects across the European continent.

We believe that Europe should become not only a matter of historical content but also one of perspective.

A European perspective considers local, regional, national and global levels. Linked to them we have all developed our historical identities.

A European perspective endeavours to introduce others to our own history. The European perspective has to bridge not only the gaps between nations and regions, but also between men and women, social, political, ethnic, or religious groups. A European perspective encourages us to look for additional ideas, sources, points of view, and to counteract prejudices linked to issues such as:

- heritage and progress
- neighbour relations
- group identities, minorities and majorities
- social, cultural and economic conflicts
- violence by or against people
- colonial past
- political ideological and religious movements
- patterns of centralization and regionalization
- processes of unification and partition
- wars, conflicts, victories, defeats

Furthermore we should introduce or emphasize new issues showing common challenges and converging developments throughout Europe in the areas of:

- human and civil rights
- gender and generation relationships
- migration
- everyday life
- economy and technology
- environment
- cultural diversity and change
- interactions between religions

To research, describe and teach issues like these also requires reflection and discussion on what we share and where we differ in Europe. We should value differences in so far as they do not harm other people. The European perspective also requires us to bear in mind the impact of our interpretations on others. This helps to avoid hostile accusations, arrogance and groundless theories of conspiracy or misunderstanding. Yet dealing carefully with history does not mean hiding any facts simply for opportunistic reasons.

2. Criteria for a European perspective

History can be dealt with by applying different approaches, for example:

- a scholarly approach
- an educational approach
- a moral approach
- a legal or judicial approach
- a political approach
- an aesthetic approach

Depending on their objectives these approaches partly follow different logical paths and should not be confused.

There are professional standards for researching, writing and teaching history crucial for our European perspective and for the understanding of each other.

History is not identical with the past. History as knowledge is culturally filtered. It is a selective reconstruction of the past and an interpretation of what has happened.

Valid reconstructions and interpretations must be based on a variety of sources. When using sources we have to differentiate between tradition, relics, oral history and documents and to take into account their significance in reconstructing the past. Sources are not self-explanatory; they are only meaningful in certain contexts.

The methods applied to historical themes have to be transparent and consistent. These include:

- a clear historical question
- a critical use of empirical evidence
- a historical perspective of interpretation, keeping in mind the knowledge, mentalities and
- values of the respective period
- a discussion of significance for the present

Multiperspectivity is fundamental to a European perspective. The same historical subject has to be systematically checked from different points of view on three levels:

- sources and material
- reconstruction and interpretation
- implications for the present

On the first level we have to look for representations of different and opposite players in the past like winners and losers, rulers and ruled, rich and poor, men and women, old and young and one's own group and the other groups.

On the second level, we have to find and to weigh up different reconstructions and controversial interpretations. Considering the different views on historical facts and processes, we have to present them in a fair way to our audience and base our own version on source evidence.

On the third level we should discuss what conclusions we can draw from the respective experience in the past for the present. Obviously, we can get different ideas from the same past.

This depends on a person's background such as nationality, religion, social status, age and gender. In our handling of history, a professional approach will include the awareness of one's personal relationship to the topic.

We cannot evaluate the full range of possible perspectives. For practical reasons we have to make choices and to explain them. Besides presenting other peoples' views multiperspectivity requires also one's own assessment.

We have to explain the relevance of our topic and approach. The criteria for relevance are highly related to current knowledge, experiences, challenges and problems. So, they can be different for every period, nation and group. This is one reason why dealing with history is an open process and never reaches definitive results.

3. The EUSTORY Mission

With our history competitions we seek to create and develop this European perspective in writing, teaching and researching history. Encouraging learning through research and independence of historical interpretation will strengthen ties between young people in Europe and the recent evolutions of historical knowledge.

Developing multiperspectivity and the critical thinking of young people will contribute to the progress of intercultural and mutual understanding and cross-border dialog in Europe, thus helping living together in peace. Dealing with history will also help young people to develop their sense of responsibility and active involvement in the life of their own communities. A new understanding of the past is thus a means for an active integration in the current world. It is a way to prepare young people for the challenges of the 21st century.

EUSTORY strives for developing understanding and co-operation between individuals, groups and nations not only in Europe, but also across the world. Such a European framework can thus be a step on the way towards a global approach. Europe and its inhabitants should participate and contribute in such a global context. This is what our EUSTORY Charter aims to promote.