

## 5. European History Forum

### **What brings us together, what separates us?**

#### **European memories of flight and expulsion in the 20th century**

Historians, journalists, creative artists and staff of museums and NGOs from eleven European countries came together at Berlin's Heinrich-Böll-Foundation from 23<sup>rd</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May to discuss about the flight and expulsion in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries within the framework of the fifth European historical forum. How can one tolerate those gruesome memories and simultaneously promote reconciliation? Which political and legal steps have been undertaken in the past decade for initiating the processes of reappraisal and compensation? Can we compile a multi-perspective memory repertoire in Europe that goes beyond emotional concernment? These and other questions have been discussed in forums and work groups with the help of various case studies. An overview follows.

#### **A commemorative European culture – Where does this idea stand today?**

Walter Kaufmann, the Head of the Department of East and Southeast Europe, said at the inauguration that the idea of a common Europeanization of the commemorative culture had sounded realistic yet challenging in the first historical forum five years back. The two event partners, the Heinrich-Böll- Foundation and the scientific information centre Memorial in Moscow, held on to the opinion of promoting pluralistic identity and commemorative culture in Europe. Walter Kaufmann explained "The merging of Europe after the end of the cold war has rightly nurtured hopes that even the walls between the historical images and the interpretations will fall with time. "Hopes that we can develop a common understanding of history in view of European 20<sup>th</sup> century, which relives the crimes of National Socialism and Stalinism as the climax points of dictatorship and thus, as negative reference points and studies them without reckoning them against each other." In view of the present refugee crisis, the war in Eastern Ukraine or strengthening of the nationalist voices across the continent, the idea of a common identity and a common European commemorative culture sounds almost utopian in the opinion of the Department Head.

The concept of a common European commemorative culture seems even more remote seen from the Russian perspective. Arsenij Roginskij, the cofounder of the memorial, has shed light upon this fact in his article. He asserted "We live in very difficult situation today, in a period wherein history has become politics". Till today, the Stalinist terror has not been reappraised; the Second World War and the cold war have been trivialized and viewed in black and white. The war and victory cult is being nurtured in the country. All in all, it deals with a dramatic situation, in which one ponders over the past with which one has not yet come to terms. "What should we do?" Arsenij Roginskij asked. He provided three approaches for the historical analysis, which were frequently discussed in the course of the forum. 1. To raise the victims of terror and deportation from their anonymity by registering their names and photos in memory books; 2. To call for a law that officially recognizes the crimes for what they were; 3. To analyze the memories and experiences of those who suffered forced migration via onsite surveys.

## **A new narrative for a new Europe**

The cultural scientist Aleida Assmann made it distinctly clear in her introductory lecture that Europe is facing a huge historical challenge today. On the one hand, it faces the challenge of finding a new narrative for the flight and expulsion history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A narrative that is detached from the context of national political instrumentalisation, free from the emotions of revenge and resentment in which the Cold War was entrenched and not created or perceived as a counter narrative to the memory of the holocaust. A narrative in which different memories of the flight and expulsion can be told as parts of a pan-European migration history.

On the other hand, this new narrative requires a new EU model. The discourse for the same has already begun. The right political spectrum wants to return to the nationalistic past of the 1950s. Aleida Assmann argued "But locking oneself in a nostalgic national past is not the solution because it is not so simple to turn the clock back." "It cannot be reversed because the European success stories involve historical, political and cultural achievements that are irreversible, I repeat, irreversible, even when one tries to reverse them".

The new EU model is called as the "European dream" of regaining and establishing peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights. "Contrary to turning away from the new challenges of Europe, the need of the hour is its opposite: Strengthening the position of Europe as a community of solidarity based on humane principles." This project Europe can be achieved only when everyone moves in the same direction: "besides politicians and civil servants, even the citizens of society; besides host communities, even refugees; besides Germany, even other European countries". "We all are responsible for how it is narrated [the unfinished history of Europe]".

## **Memories of forced migration to Eastern and Southeastern Europe**

The first discussion forum took place subsequent to the appeal of Aleida Assmanns. Which flight and expulsion memories are vivid, which are promoted, which are rather suppressed? Scholars and activists from Ukraine, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Russia dedicated themselves to these questions. Various case studies were considered.

The historian Andrii Portnov, resident of Kiev and Berlin, made a start with his contribution about the Ukrainian-Polish history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He commemorated some significant events: on the one hand, the Polish-Ukrainian war of 1918 and on the other hand, the massacre of Volhynia of 1943 initiated by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in which around 60,000 Polish people were massacred and which the Polish call as genocide today. On the contrary, this topic is widely suppressed in Ukraine and at the most, described as a tragedy.

Apart from this, he spoke about the forced migration from Ukraine to Western Poland in 1947 and the present Ukrainian migration to Poland for economic reasons. The Polish government calls these people as refugees in order to dispute the EU- refugee quota. Based on the motto: We cannot absorb any Syrian, we already have our own refugees. Furthermore, Andrii Portnov described the dramatic position of the Ukrainian domestic refugees. 1.5 to two million people are presently on the run as a result of war in the East and the Crimean crisis within the country.

In spite of the complex history of flight and expulsion that goes on till today, both countries refuse to take responsibility for the events. Apart from this, there is often a lack of contextualization. The second case study of Belma Bećirbašić from Sarajevo dealt with the

topic of sexual violence as a side effect or means of expulsion. The journalist studied the systematic gang rapes during the Bosnian war from 1992 to 1995. Belma Bećirbašić narrated how women's bodies were ill treated to demoralize the opponent. Rapes are being used even today as weapons of war, whether in Sudan, in Syria or in the Congo. Yet the international community does not recognize them as such. The fate of around 20000 women and girls is unclear - in spite of the Kunarac judgement adopted by the UNO war crimes tribunal in the year 2001 in which rapes were recognized as crime against humanity. In spite of this, large numbers of culprits continue to remain unpunished. The women were further discriminated by the society. The government did not pay any compensations. This topic was trivialized instead, by the public.

Irrespective of the grim overview, few positive rays of hope were seen. The film "Grbavica" of Jasmila Žbanić from the year 2006 in which a twelve year old girl finds out that her mother was raped and she was the child of the rapist led to isolated social compensations.

The third case study was presented with Alexander Cherkassov's statements on the deportation of the Chechen and Ingush people during the Second World War. The head of the Human Rights Center Memorial in Moscow articulated that no one from Russia and the Russian Republic of Chechnya even remembers 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1944. On the contrary, this day is celebrated as the Defender of the Fatherland day (up to 1991: Red Army Day). Another day entered as a day of remembrance in the history of Chechens: the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, a day after the death anniversary of the father of the current president, Akhmad Kadyrov, who was assassinated during the parade on the victory day in the year 2004.

Since 1994, a memorial was built in the memory of deportees in central Grozny. However, it was demolished in 2014. Parts of it were rebuilt near the memorial constructed for police officers who lost their lives in the course of antiterrorist operations. The original purpose of the memorials has been completely lost. Those who wanted to study the history of the deportees would be followed and arrested, as in the case of Ruslan Kutaev. There is no official memory of the deportations and yet, this subject is a matter of extensive discussion among the affected families.

Besides the forced migration of 1944, the Caucasus war in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the two Chechen wars in the past 22 years are a part of the memory of Chechnya today. Alexander Cherkassov expressed his doubt "I fear that this grave legacy will start new crises. Especially so, since it is neither reflected nor discussed in Russia".

### **The difficult path of forgiveness and reappraisal**

Which political and legal steps were undertaken in the last decade to reconcile the reappraisal of the injustice suffered, the compensation of losses and the necessary adaptation to a new reality? The second forum tried to answer this question with the help of different examples. Georgia, Crimea and Caucasus were discussed.

The historians from Tbilisi, David Jishkariani and Giorgi Sordia, initiated the discussion. They spoke about the fate of the Meskhetians, who were once inhabitants of the Georgian-Turkish border. David Jishkariani conveyed that in the year 1937, Moscow had sent an expedition to this region with the task of determining the nationalities of the border inhabitants. The results had been personally forwarded to Lavrenty Beria, who later on executed the Stalin purges. David Jishkariani put forth the viewpoint that Soviet government had found it difficult to control the border region. The people living there were sometimes designated as Turkish people, sometimes as Turks and other times as Azerbaijani. The permanent deportations were undertaken to gain control of the region till 1944.

Giorgi Sordia explained why the Meskhetians stayed away from their original homeland even today. Only a small population returned to Georgia in the 1960s and the 1970s, however, they went to the West of the country. They were not allowed to travel to the border region. Thousands of other Meskhetians continued to stay in foreign countries including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and since 2004/05, even in the USA. By the end of the 1990s, the Georgian government was obligated to ensure the return of Meskhetians as a pre-condition for the inclusion of the country in the European Council. However, nothing much has happened in spite of the finally adopted law for the repatriation of the Meskhetians in the year 2007. Sordia opined the government has done too little to counter the ethnic nationalism dominating in Georgia since 1990, which smelt danger for the community in the settlement of non - Christians. The people could come, however, they received no support for local integration. Neither did they get any housing nor was any support provided to them. The historical connections were not explained to the Georgian population. A true political will could not be seen in the Meskhetian issue, which is why the overall situation was hardly conducive to optimism.

Gulnara Bekirowa reported about the historical memory of the Crimean Tatars. This topic had become the focus of wider public awareness in the recent past – whether through the Eurovision song contest - contribution of Jamela, who had emerged this year as the winner of the international competition for “1944” or from the multiple awards winning film “Chajtarma” of the year 2013 depicting the deportation. The film is banned in Russia today.

Gulnara Bekirowa expressed that since the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the Ukrainian minority has increasingly been under pressure. The annual events on 18<sup>th</sup> May in remembrance of the deportation and historical event, which have been labeled as genocide by the Ukrainian government- were banned, just like the representative bodies of the Crimean Tatars. Even publications, such as her book about Mustafa Dzhemilev that was published in 2014, has been withdrawn from circulation by the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation FSB in Crimea. Spokespersons of the Crimean Tatars, such as previously mentioned Mustafa Dzhemilev or Refat Chubarov, were no longer allowed to travel to Crimea. And as if all these developments were already not worrying enough, the independence of the press on the peninsula was a matter of the past.

The discussion round was concluded with two contributions about the memories of the expulsion and assassination of Serbian and Croatian civilians from the Krajina region during the Croatian war from 1991 to 1995. Dragan Markovina, the historian from Split, and Vesna Teršelič, also historian and head of the centre for reconciliation with the past, Documenta, in Zagreb, reported about the complex events.

The crimes had not been reappraised, although more than 20 years had passed after the war ended. The Croatians remembered the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, the day on which the military offensive “Storm” began as the day of the victory. Vesna Teršelič explained “In the previous year, there was, in fact, a military parade, which is rather unusual”. The Serbian victim was officially expelled from thoughts. On the contrary, the society has been deeply divided with regard to the events. However, efforts were made at the civic level to give a face to the victims. Teršelič informed that 500 affected persons had been interviewed as per the current status in the framework of the project available on the internet [www.croatianmemories.org](http://www.croatianmemories.org).

### **Are flight and expulsion a part of the European memory?**

Can a new European identity emerge from the totality of the flight experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? The third discussion forum dealt with this question. Małgorzata Ruchniewicz (Historian in the University of Wrocław), Jaroslav Šonka (Publicist from Prague) and Stefan Troebst (Historian in the University of Leipzig) participated in this discussion.

The latter explained why he remained presently unconvinced regarding the development of the European memory in the EU-historical politics. He rather observed the development of a Central European memory, whose driving force was the German-Polish side. Amongst other things, a resolution in the European parliament had set this motor in motion. Its lowest common political denominator has been that the totalitarianism was the basic evil of the previous century. Troebst stated "The consensus does not go beyond that". He was of the opinion that even the House of the European history planned in Brussels would not bring about any multiperspective view of the flight and expulsion issue. The central narrative of the permanent exhibition – which was subject to the confidentiality until the inauguration and was not to be discussed publically- was already decided and not negotiable. According to Troebst, a cyclical sequence was outlined, which was captioned with titles such as "Europe on the rise" (from the medieval ages to the early modern era), "Darkness over Europe" (first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), "The divided house" (the cold war years) and also "Overcoming of frontiers" (after 1989) and finally it will end with an outlook "into an obvious bright future" as one can assume.

Małgorzata Ruchniewicz and Jaroslav Šonka further enhanced Troebst' statements with insights into the German-Polish and German-Czech reappraisal processes. Many issues that were handed down in the first decade after the Second World War in the victor or victim discourses and opposed the reconciliation, can now be addressed in the dialogue between Poland and Germany or the Czech Republic and Germany and can be viewed in an entirely different perspective subsequent to an explicit denunciation of restitution and revenge. The narrative of the common European house does not play any significant role in this process.

The ensuing discussion was exciting as the conversation turned to the topic of the European inheritance of colonialism and the role played by the United States of America as an instigator, an overseer and a guarantor for liberal Europe. Surprisingly, both these discourses have played no role in the conceptualization of the House of European history or not to a significant extent.

### **Best practice experiences in art and education**

During the history forum, it became evident, time and again, that creative artists often entrench important impulses. Whether in the exhibition "Beyond the borders – exploration among the forgotten refugees of the South Caucasus" of the photographer Jan Zychlinski, discussion with the artist Małgorzata Miśniakiewicz, co-curator of the project "Presenting a lost home" in the framework of the cultural capital Wrocław or artist conversations with the Aslan Gaisumov born in Grozny in 1991, whose video installations illustrate the history of violence in a very simple and impressive manner. His works are currently being presented for the first time in the [Museum of Contemporary Art](#), Antwerp in a solo exhibition.

More best practice experiences are presented from the educational field such as e.g. the project "Bringing together divided memory" of the art historian Georg Traska of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. Besides this, multiple options that lie at the bottom of internet based history portals were discussed. Walter Kaufmann suggested that this topic must be discussed in greater detail in the forthcoming European history forum.

### **Several open questions and few answers**

Several questions remained unanswered at the end of the history forum. Finally, three specific issues led to the final statements:

Walter Kaufmann summarized conclusively that on the one hand, it is clear that war and brutal population policies exist hand in hand. Even today, the fact holds true that desired or suffered political consequences of a war are strewn across the history of deportation and

expulsion. Forced migration memories are largely subject to the side to which the expelled population or refugees belonged. The historical discourse about the expulsion must detach itself from this consideration, he asserted.

The second subject dealt with the problem of reappraisal, compensation and reconciliation. Several ambiguous questions came to light in this field. To what extent should one should reconcile with the consequences of war and expulsion? These consequences cannot be reversed – if one desires reversal, one would quickly place oneself in a position of revenge. “But one must look for models that ensure that the affected people and injustice inflicted upon them is not sidetracked as has been the case; and can be compensated – via public reappraisal, rehabilitation, eventually compensation.”

The third major political issue was the perspective of reconciliation in a large European area and the reconciliation of different memories. Many pragmatic steps had already been undertaken, however, discourses had been simultaneously masked out. “Multiple grim and open questions remain. The forum must contribute towards reappraising these questions in an interesting form and discussing them with each other”. This discussion would be continued in the next year.

### **Supplement: Afternoon Excursion**

As always, excursions were offered at the history forum. These led to the memorial transit camp Marienfelde, the central museum in Germany for flight and emigration from DDR; the memorial of the Berlin wall; the intercultural garden Rosenduft, a meeting place for migrants, expelled people and local people from Bosnia-Herzegovina; and the International Congress Centre (ICC) that currently houses 600 refugees. The excursion participants conversed about the work and the challenges faced with Matthias Nowak, the head the NGO Malteser Berlin for refugee relief and Anei von Hülsen-Poensgen, volunteer for refugee relief activities.

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