The House of European History: Pöttering's Elite-Level Impact in shaping European Identity

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Abstract. The House of European History in Brussels, Belgium, is a pan-European identity-making institution, created by the European Union. It has sparked an array of scholarship that speaks to the power of the museum, its ability to create a master narrative for the European people, and the varying omissions and choices made in telling Europe's history. While European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering receives credit for originating the museum, little scholarship speaks to his ideas regarding European Union integration, community, and its identity – even though, elite leader ideas are recognized in nationalism studies as instrumental in the making of an identity. This article fills this gap and shows how Pöttering's ideas influenced the broad and generalized narrative the House of European History espouses today.
Key Words: House of European History, European Union, European Integration, European Identity, Hans-Gert Pöttering.

Politinio elito įtaka Europos tapatybės kūrimui: Europos istorijos namai ir H. G. Pötteringo vizija

Santrauka. Europos istorijos namai Briuselyje, Belgijos Karalystėje, yra Europos Sąjungos įkurta europinio lygmens tapatybės formavimo institucija. Šio muziejaus reikšmė ir poveikis formuojant visus europiečius suartinantį „didįjį pasakojimą" ir su juo susijusius nutylėjimus, pasirinkimus analizuota jau daugelyje mokslinių tyrimų. Europos istorijos namų sumanytojas ir įkvėpėjas yra buvęs Europos Parlamento pirmininkas Hansas-Gertas Pötteringas. Nors nacionalizmo studijose pripažįstama, jog būtent vadovaujančiojo elito idėjos atlieka labai svarbų vaidmenį formuojant tapatybę ir ją įkūnijantį „didįjį" pasakoji-

mą, H.-G. Pötteringo idėjos Europos Sąjungos integracijos, Europos bendruomenės ir jos tapatybės klausimais nėra plačiau analizuotos. Šiuo straipsniu siekiama užpildyti šią nišą ir atskleisti H. G. Pötteringo politinių vizijų poveikį, formuojant apibendrinantį istorinį pasakojimą, kurį šiandien pateikia ir puoselėja Europos istorijos namai.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Europos istorijos namai, Europos Sąjunga, europinė integracija, europinė tapatybė, Hansas-Gertas Pötteringas.

Introduction

In 2007, then European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering outlined in his inaugural presidential speech his desire to create a pan-European museum that would awaken in the European people their historical consciousness and allow them to see what it means to be European. In 2017, after a ten-year process, the doors of the House of European History (HEH) finally opened in Brussels, Belgium. The museum joins a long list of efforts by the European Union to instill a sense of Europeanness amongst its citizens. This includes clear treaty and preamble language, symbols, commemoration days, and day-to-day interactions that normalize the existence of the supranational organization in the people's lives.[1] Nonetheless, the museum marks a departure from normalization efforts, as this educational site is a tangible manifestation of the European Union's identity ethos and its identity objectives. Pöttering's influence in the making of this museum transforms this building into an elite-level tool to instill a new European narrative for the institution, thus demarcating who belongs, who does not, what to remember, and what to forget.

This article joins a growing number of scholarly works that analyze the merits of the HEH in the landscape of other European institutions, illustrating the importance of the physical embodiment of the European's "soul" in the Union's integration project. Although much of the scholarship focuses largely on the outcome of the museum, what stories it highlights, and what stories it fails to include, little

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[1]   Kathleen McNamara, "Imagining Europe: The Cultural Foundations of EU Governance," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 53 (2015): 22–39.

scholarship speaks to the ideational origin story of this museum, and how it came to be. I argue in this article that Pöttering significantly shaped the way the museum was framed and discussed during the process of making it. While his idea for a museum is widely noted, there is no genuine discussion on what his ideas were about the European identity, the European people, and the purpose of European integration in general. This particularity, however, matters when we discuss how the museum has been envisioned by the supranational leader. By process-tracing his set of ideas, I argue that Pöttering created an ideational zeitgeist of ideas about the European Union, which shaped the spectrum of possibilities for the making of a European identity, which in turn he implemented in the HEH as a framework on how Europeans should feel about their place in said community.

I focus on Pöttering, as he stands out amongst other elite leaders at the time due to his *supranational* position and leadership styles, which permitted his position to even suggest a pan-European museum structure for the European Union. Given his centrality in the organization, he holds second-dimension agenda-setting power,[2] which allows him to create an idea scope that brings to light an intensified attempt to connect with the European people at a time that saw the rise of crises in the community, such as the failed Constitutional Treaty, the Eurozone Crisis, and the on-going refugee crisis. This article highlights the ideas he held, as they are the catalyst for the creation of the HEH. In the making of the museum, Pöttering's ideas frame the discourse of goals, and the museum's ultimate outcomes – including its narratives and omissions.

The mid-2000s and onward in the European Union represent an active identity making effort phase by the European Union, emphasized by the possibility in the European Union to even consider such a project as the HEH.[3] As I show in this article, although the muse-

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[2]   Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Powers to Lead* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[3]   Jennifer Ostojski, "The European Union's Transactional Identity: An Ideational Elite-Driven Model" (Northeastern University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2022).

um aims to provide a place of dialogue and communal activities, the creation process is marked by a clear idea of transactional values that the museum is supposed to demonstrate to its guests.[4] Transactional identity-making is a framework that advances a shallow, tit-for-tat relationship between the European people and the political institutions.

This framework emphasizes universal values and benefits the political unit provides to its people, vying for appreciation and recognition. It is devoid of emotional goals and values short-term benefits over long-term relationship building. The HEH ultimately is a tool, employed by the Union's elite leader(s), that wants the European people (1) to understand their supranational political organization, (2) to appreciate the work the organization does for the people, and (3) to see it as (possibly) the only solution to Europe's woes in the post-World War II era. In that, the museum stays away from nuanced and balanced depictions of European history, and it instead provides a broad overarching (relatively known) story of Europe that, although aiming to reach all its visitors, lacks a deeper *Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung* due to its transactional aims and needs. As I argue below, this transactionality and shallowness are a direct reflection of Pöttering's position on European identity and integration.

In the remainder of this paper, I first situate the HEH in the literature of European identity. Then I briefly address Pöttering's idea package and the subsequent identity zeitgeist. Further, I outline what the museum currently looks like, describing shortly its different sections. This is followed by process-tracing of how the ideas were manifested and changed in the making of the museum. Lastly, I will discuss my findings and discuss how the transactional nature of this museum in the European Union's identity-making efforts affects its audience, the European people.

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4   Ostojski, "The European Union's Transactional Identity: An Ideational Elite Driven Model."

1. Understanding European Identity

According to Martinelli and Cavalli an identity is "an aggregating and motivating nucleus of values, symbols, and meanings that translate into norms of coexistence, political and social institutions, as well as life practices."[5] Identities do not have to mirror reality; they just need to appear real. This "imagined community,"[6] then, carries political power and weight.[7] Elite leaders invent new identities to attain and maintain power within a community as well as instill legitimacy.[8] Amongst an array of varying tools to achieve that goal, a state-funded museum can narrate a community's story succinctly.[9]

A supranational institution, such as the European Union, is not precluded from developing an identity. European identity is an "empirical reality."[10] A constructivist approach to European identity bears some complications: (1) the lack of agreement as to what European identity looks like, what its dimensions are, and how it relates to other national identities; (2) the normative biases of claiming the need for a European identity to overcome 'bad nationalism'; and (3) the different manners in which European identity is measured

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[5] Alberto Martinelli and Alessandro Cavalli, *European Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 15.

[6] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York City: Verso, 1983).

[7] Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans?: Transnational Identities and Public Spheres* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Vincent Della Sala, "Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 48 (2010): 1–19.

[8] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York City: Free Press, 1964); Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Daniel N. Posner, "Measuring Ethnic Fractionalization in Africa," *American Journal of Political Science* 48 (2004): 849–863.

[9] Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[10] Bahar Rumelili and Muenevver Cebeci, "Theorizing European Identity: Contributions to Constructivist IR debates on Collective Identity," in *European Identity Revisited*, ed. by Viktoria Kaina, Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, and Sebastian Kuhn (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016), 32.

across the scholarship.[11] Much of the scholarship draws the boundaries politically around the European Union institutions, agrees on the necessity of European identity as an addition to the institution's framework to continue integration, and assumes that European citizens can hold multiple forms of identity, meaning merging of identities is possible.[12]

Scholars approach studying European identity in varying ways (i.e., anthropology, sociology, history, and political science) and methodologies (i.e., experiments, ethnographic fieldwork, qualitative interviews, and large-N/mixed method approaches). They come together in their extensive study focus on who identifies with the European Union, and how narratives are formed from symbolisms. Here, a specific sector of the scholarship focuses on the role that symbols play in the making of a European identity (i.e., anthem, flags, traditions, holidays, and even architecture). McNamara[13] and Sassatelli,[14] for instance, show that the euro does not necessarily create a sense of Europeanness, but it does normalize the institution in people's lives.

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[11]   Jochen Roose, "European Identity after Ockham's Razor: European Identification," in *European Identity Revisited*, ed. by Viktoria Kaina, Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, and Sebastian Kuhn (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016).

[12]   See for example: John M. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Cris Shore, "In uno plures (?) EU Cultural Policy and the Governance of Europe," *Cultural Analysis* 5 (2006): 7–26; Gerard Delanty, "Models of European Identity: Reconciling Universalism and Particularism," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 3 (3) (2002): 345–359; Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter Katzenstein, *European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Risse, *A Community of Europeans?: Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*; Phillipp Heinrich, "Experimental Exposure to the EU Energy Label: Trust and Implicit Identification with the EU," in *European Identity Revisited*, ed. by Viktoria Kaina, Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, and Sebastian Kuhn (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016); Viktoria Kaina and Sebastian Kuhn, "Building 'Us' and Constructing 'Them': Mass European Identity Building and the Problem of Inside-Outside Definitions," in *European Identity Revisited*, ed. by Viktoria Kaina, Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, and Sebastian Kuhn (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016); Roose, "European Identity after Ockham's Razor: European Identification," 2016.

[13]   McNamara, "Imagining Europe: The Cultural Foundations of EU Governance."

[14]   Monica Sassatelli, "'Europe in Your Pocket': Narratives of Identity in Euro Iconography," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 25 (3) (2017): 354–366.

Those who interact more frequently with it are much more likely to embrace the institution.[15] Heinrich[16] provides an additional example, showing that the European energy label on consumer products similarly evokes trust and normalization in the European people.

Bruter[17] exposes in experiments European citizens to positive and negative media news stories about the European Union as well as to symbols promoted by the organization. He shows that news stories can more easily sway a person's perception than symbols can. Further, Bruter[18] demonstrates that perceptions of the institution and a person's place in the community can be altered over time, meaning that identities are fluid and can be impacted by external policy choices.[19] Cram & Patrikios[20] even show that symbols can increase in importance when the audience perceives them under threat, forming impromptu an "us vs them" narrative that requires a European citizen's protection.

State-run museums perform a dual function, both celebrating a nation and assuring security and identity for a community.[21] The nation presented must be shown in a positive light, so as the audience, meaning the museum's guest, can easily accept the narrative. Rarely does this allow for parallel narratives or even dissenting po-

[15] Laura Cram and Stratos Patrikios, "European Union Symbols under Threat: Identity Considerations," in *European Identity Revisited*, ed. by Viktoria Kaina, Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski, and Sebastian Kuhn (Milton Park: Routledge, 2016).

[16] Cram and Patrikios, "European Union Symbols under Threat: Identity Considerations."

[17] Michael Bruter, "Winning Hearts and Minds for Europe: The Impact of News and Symbols on Civic and Cultural European Identity," *Comparative Political Studies* 36 (10) (2003): 1148–1179.

[18] Michael Bruter, "On What Citizens Mean by Feeling 'European': Perceptions of News, Symbols and Borderless-Ness," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30 (1) (2004): 21–39.

[19] Lisa Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 96 (4) (2002): 713–728.

[20] Cram and Patrikios, "European Union Symbols under Threat: Identity Considerations."

[21] Martin R. Schaerer, "National Museums – Difficulties and Possibilities. A Museological Approach," *Entering the Minefields: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe*, ed. by Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont and Chantal Kesteloot (EuNaMus Report No 9, 2012: 37–43).

sitions.[22] For governments, museums are a key policy issue "as places for re-enacting communities and values in contemporary society."[23] Luke summarizes museums' ideological purposes as "nodes of knowledge, regime of rules, spaces of objectivity."[24]

Like other symbols in the European Union universe, these symbols play an important part in the making of museums in general – and in the HEH specifically. Symbols and artefacts chosen in the exhibitions are utilized to sell the audience on a particular story, demarcating not just the imagined past of the community but also outlining its potential future.[25] The artefacts chosen by experts to be displayed, meaning they are taken out of their original context, directly guide the audience into a certain normative direction and tell them "what reality really is."[26] Museum narratives are thus inherently connected to the shaping of a community's identity. Pöttering's choice, thus, to convey a particular message to the audience about their shared past and memory should not be lightly disregarded, as it allows the European Union to redirect "the consciousness and behavior of museum visitors to advance various governmental goals."[27]

As a site of remembrance, meaning shaping a community's memory of itself, a museum is a necessary tool in the making of a (European) identity.[28] The museum becomes a common space in which a shared history is displayed, thus creating for its audience a col-

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[22] Martin R. Schaerer, "National Museums – Difficulties and Possibilities. A Museological Approach."

[23] Peter Aronsson, "Reflections on Policy Relevance and Research in EuNaMus, "European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen,"" *Entering the Minefields: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe*, ed. by Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont and Chantal Kesteloot (EuNaMus Report No 9, 2012: 25–33).

[24] Luke, *Museum Politics*, 223.

[25] Aronsson, "Reflections on Policy Relevance and Research in EuNaMus, "European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen.""

[26] Luke, *Museum Politics*, 220.

[27] Luke, *Museum Politics*, 3.

[28] Susan A. Crane, "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum," *History and Theory* 36 (4) (1997): 44–63; Risse, *A Community of Europeans?: Transnational Identities and Public Spheres.*

lective memory, which in turn elite leaders use to evoke emotional attachment to the political community, legitimizing its existence and actions to the people and itself.[29] Memory is not simply a depiction of history, which is understood as the chronology of events, but it is rather an attempt at understanding the 'why' of it. In its value as a tool for elites to promote a political project, memory is not a static concept but rather its fluid construction and – probably more importantly – its interpretation.[30] Little European studies scholarship speaks to how European identity is impacted by elite leaders' choices within the European Union. A few examples highlight the history of implementing cultural policies in the European Union to strengthen the community's in-group. Shore[31] and Kaelble[32] discuss in their analysis, which begins in the 1970s and 1980s, what sort of policies were implemented by institutions and leaders. Hersant[33] elaborates that observations regarding cultural policies and their effects require time and should not be narrowed down to individual symbols or policies. And even with these authors' contributions on cultural policies and temporal observations, there is no understanding of where these policies come from and how symbols are created. Even though, they are ultimately the outcome of elite-level decision-making in the European Union. This also pertains to the HEH and its role in the making of a European identity.

As noted earlier, the scholarship on the HEH is expanding. Three overarching themes dominate the discourse: (1) the making of the

[29] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*; Crane, "Memory, Distortion, and History in the Museum."

[30] Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science"; Patrycja Bladys and Katarzyna Piatek, "Memory Politicized. Polish Media and Politics of Memory – Case Study," *Media I Spoleczenstwo* (6) (2016): 64–77.

[31] Shore, "In uno plures (?) EU Cultural Policy and the Governance of Europe."

[32] Hartmut Kaelble, "Identification with Europe and Politicization of the EU since the 1980s," in *European Identity*, ed. by Checkel Jeffrey T. and Peter Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[33] Yves Hersant, "Against Euroculture," in *An Identity for Europe*, ed. by Rita Kastoryano (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

museum;[34] (2) the museum's potential to develop a master narrative for the European people; and (3) the omission of narratives. Here, authors have focused on the museum as a potential decolonizing space,[35] gender equality narratives in the museum,[36] the omission of nation-state narratives,[37] and religion.[38] Here, all attribute the origin of the museum to Pöttering, yet only Kaiser[39] dives deeper into the elite leader's role in the making of the museum. He highlights Pöttering's position at the European Parliament, including his time as its president from 2007–2009, that made it possible to propose the museum in the first place. Kaiser[40] emphasizes Pöttering's religious background that impacted the normative angle the European leader pursued in the making of this site of remembrance. Interestingly, Kaiser[41] argues that inconsistencies and lack of commitment on

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[34] Pieter Huistra, Marijm Molema, and Daniel Wirt, "Political Values in a European Museum," *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 10 (1) (2014): 124–136; Wolfram Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 55 (3) (2017): 518–534; 20; Anastasia Remes, "Memory, Identity and the Supranational History Museum: Building the House of European History," *Memoria e Ricerca* 1 (2017): 99–116.

[35] Johanna Turunen, "Decolonising European Minds through Heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26 (10) (2020): 1013–1028; 2020; Katrin Sieg, *Decolonizing German and European History at the Museum* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

[36] Ann Ighe, "Never Mind Patriarchy, but do Mention the War! Reflections on the Absence of Gender History from the House of European History," *European Review* 28 (3) (2020): 365–377.

[37] Huistra et al., "Political Values in a European Museum," 2014; Christopher Garbowski, "The Polish Debate on the House of European History in Brussels," *The Polish Review* 65 (4) (2020).

[38] Carla Danani and Daria Rezzoli-Olgiati, "Public Memory under Construction: Exploring Religion in the House of European History in Brussels," in *Religion in Representations of Europe*, ed. Stefanie Knauss and Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2023).

[39] Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project."

[40] Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project."

[41] Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project."

part of Pöttering played a role in the creation of a much broader and less concrete narrative the museum espouses today. Missing, though, from this argument is that inconsistencies are not a random coincidence but rather a reflection of how Pöttering viewed and assessed key aspects of European integration and identity. My work puts more agency in the hands of elite actors, such as Pöttering, and puts more emphasis on their ideas in their policy choices.

This article builds on the existing scholarship on European identity and the HEH, providing a constructivist umbrella, and arguing that discussions on narratives and omissions in the HEH fail to incorporate the origin of the making of the museum. Here, instead of simply looking at the timeline of the museum's development, it is necessary to also add an understanding of who the elite leader behind the operation was, and what their ideas and thoughts were on European identity itself, the role of the European people, and the purpose of the European integration.

2. Methodology

In this article I present an elite-leader zeitgeist that Pöttering frames regarding the European identity, the European people, and the purpose of the European integration project. Here, I take a 'hard' constructivist approach,[42] arguing that ideas are instrumental for elite leaders in their policy-making decisions. I trace Pöttering's ideas through interviews he has given, in writing and video format, as well as his own written accords on his understanding of the European Union, according to the three objectives outlined above. My primary sources focused on content regarding the European Union, Pöttering's involvement, and his perceptions of the organization and its future. I chose to discard content that focused on domestic (German) commentary as well as sources that addressed policy issues and con-

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[42]   Alexander J. Motyl, "Inventing Invention: The Limits of National Identity Formation," *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nations*, ed. by Ronald G. Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (University of Michigan Press, 2001).

cerns not related to European identity, the European people, and the House of European History.

My focus on the power of ideas builds on existing scholarship, which asserts that ideas are not a last option of consideration when other variables cannot explain an outcome.[43] In that, as Schmidt argues,[44] on top of shaping a context, ideas in fact define the context. Important here is that they shape the context in a chronological order, impacting future outcomes and limiting possibilities.[45] My choice for process-tracing and the establishment of the zeitgeist discourse builds on existing scholarship, which acknowledges that ideas, as an independent variable, require rigorous descriptions of the environment, the institutions, and the impact of these ideas.[46] In that, detailed descriptions also can withstand criticism that ideational work generally receives.[47]

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[43] Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science"; Alan M. Jacobs, "Process-tracing the Effects of Ideas," *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, ed. by Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 41–73; Craig Parsons, "Ideas and Power: Four Intersections and How to show Them," *Journal of European Public Policy* 23 (3) (2016): 446–463; John Gerard Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-Utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization* 52 (4) (1998): 855–885; Peter J. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (Columbia University Press, 1996); Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2003).

[44] Vivien A. Schmidt, "Taking Ideas and Discourse Seriously: Explaining Change through Discursive Institutionalism as the Fourth 'New Institutionalism'," *European Political Science Review* 2 (1) (2010): 1–25; Vivien A. Schmidt, "Discursive Institutionalism: Understanding Policy in Context," *Handbook of Critical Policy Studies*, ed. by Frank Fischer, Douglas Torgerson, Anna Durnova, and Michael Orisini (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015); Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2003).

[45] Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Cornell University Press, 1993); Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe*.

[46] Dietrich Rueschemeyer, "Why and How Ideas Matter," *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. by Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford University Press, 2006); Peter A. Hall, "Systemic Process Analysis: When and How to use It," *European Management Review* 3 (1) (2006): 24–31; Jacobs, "Process-tracing the Effects of Ideas"; Parsons, "Ideas and Power: Four Intersections and How to show Them."

[47] Rueschemeyer,"Why and How Ideas Matter."

When looking at the power of ideas specifically, Goldstein and Keohane outline that ideas in a political context hold three clear functions: a roadmap for a state; strategic coordination for actors; a tool for institutionalization.[48] They differentiate world views, broad general ideas which are hard to dispute; principled beliefs indicating a right or wrong; and lastly, causal beliefs which are in this article's context important, as their essence causes a direct effect or outcome. Although the European treaty framework is filled with world views and principled beliefs, the same framework also allows for causal beliefs to emerge and impact the concrete policy-decisions of the European elite-leaders. It is here where I position Pöttering's desire to create a museum to educate the European people and raise awareness of their shared pasts. The museum, thus, is the outcome or effect of his ideas. The description of the zeitgeist and the making of the museum are the process in which the idea takes shape and frames the context.

3. The Elite Leader Zeitgeist

Hans-Gert Pöttering (1945), European Parliament President from 2007 to 2009,[49] significantly shaped the European identity zeitgeist at the time of making the museum, showing through his ideas and efforts the possibilities for the community's identity and its purpose in the tangible manifestation of the community's narrative. Pöttering was born after World War II and later a young boy when the European Coal and Steel Community was formed. He always made clear that losing his father the last weeks of the World War II immensely shaped his belief in the European Union's peace and unity efforts.[50]

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[48]   Goldstein and Keohane, *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*.

[49]   Pöttering was a member of the European Parliament from 1979 till 2014.

[50]   Hans-Gert Pöttering and Ludger Kühnhardt, "EU – USA: Plädoyer für einen Atlantischen Vertrag," *Integration* 26 (3) (2003): 244–250; Euractiv, "Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament," filmed 2007, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fi-p9ASNweA. "Angela Merkel's EU Policy is Good for Germany – and for the Rest of Europe," *The Guardian*, August 24, 2013; "Hans-Gert Pöttering: "Europe

In the eyes of the German politician, the European Union was a strong international actor, which did not require attention paid only to its economic purpose. Its solid liberal values, which constituted the organization's backbone, were capable of thwarting outside dangers to the community.[51]

He argued that the European Union should embrace its internal strengths more, exercising its strength onto its member-states when diverting too far from commonly held principles in the community. Here, though, he believed that the community's members lacked an understanding of its identity, leading to said divergence. He stated that "It is however crucial to understand and to communicate that the EU means something different for each member state and for each society; for some it is primarily an economic community, for others a political one. Some societies primarily expect solidarity while for others it is a community of law in which rules have to be kept and implemented."[52] With proper education and guidance on "the common European history"[53] this conflict could be remedied. A political project, such as the HEH, could "help to be a first to enhance this mutual understanding which will be of key importance to preserve our community of values and thus be a credible and capable actor in the future."[54] Pöttering, nonetheless, believed that the shaping of European identity was not just a one-way process, convinced that the European people also had a responsibility to become more interested in the institution itself.[55]

Needs to Embrace Its Regional and Global Role," *Dianeosis*, February 2019, https://www.dianeosis.org/en/2019/02/europe-pottering/; "Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering," *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, https://www.kas.de/en/statische-inhalte-detail/-/content/dr.-hans-gert-Pöttering, accessed August 18, 2023.

[51] "Hans-Gert Pöttering: "Europe Needs to Embrace Its Regional and Global Role," *Dianeosis*, 2019.

[52] *Dianeosis.*

[53] *Dianeosis.*

[54] *Dianeosis*.

[55] "Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament," *Academy of Cultural Diplomacy*, filmed 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_i6oWqijY1w; Pöttering, 2013; "Leaders Beyond the State: An Interview with Hans-Gert Pöttering," *EUI TV*, filmed December 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNlyZPZ4q58.

The former parliamentary president also embraced such initiatives as the Erasmus+ program, highlighting that the young citizens of the European Union mattered a lot to him in the making of a European community.[56] To make this particular demographic more aware of Europe in general and specifically their place in it, it was important to Pöttering, to illustrate shared historical commonalities.[57] To build on their shared convictions, Pöttering wanted to create a better environment in which that was possible. Through this idea, he pictured the HEH as a site for a shared dialogue and a site for mutually constitutive identity-making.[58] Thus, in his inaugural presidential address to the European Parliament in 2007, he articulated his desire to create a museum.[59] Pöttering stated that the museum "should not be a dry, boring museum, but a place where our memory of European history and the work of European unification is jointly cultivated, and which at the same time is available as a locus for the European identity to go on being shaped by present and future citizens of the European Union."[60] To him, the museum's narrative would overcome the previous normalization of the European Union, which had led to collective forgetting and a collective casualness about the uniqueness of the organization.[61]

Pöttering had a clear idea of European identity. His Catholic background played significantly into that.[62] Although acknowledging that

[56]   "Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament," 2009; "Leaders Beyond the State: An Interview with Hans-Gert Pöttering," 2017.

[57]   "Leaders Beyond the State: An Interview with Hans-Gert Pöttering," 2017; *Dianeosis*.

[58]   "3. Inaugural address by the President of the European Parliament," *European Parliament*, February 13, 2007, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-6-2007-02-13-ITM-003_GA.html; "Leaders Beyond the State: An Interview with Hans-Gert Pöttering," 2017.

[59]   "3. Inaugural Address by the President of the European Parliament," 2007; Andrea Mork and Perikles Christodoulou, *Creating the House of European History* (Imprimerie Centrale de Luxembourg, 2018), 11.

[60]   "3. Inaugural Address by the President of the European Parliament," 2007.

[61]   Mork and Christodoulou, 2018.

[62]   Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and Narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project," 2017.

the European treaties and preambles, which created the superstructure of the European Union, made no mention of Christianity per se, Pöttering would have liked to include language to Europe's Christian heritage in the 2007 Lisbon treaty. Aware that some member-states would have not appreciated an institutionalizing of Judeo-Christian traditions in the community's make-up, Pöttering wanted, nonetheless, it explicitly included in the quasi-constitutional text of Lisbon, as he believed that the previous treaties implicitly spoke to Christian values.[63]

And yet, even with his pan-European cultural and historic ambitions, Pöttering drew a clear separating line between nation-state and European identity. He argued that the European Union was not in the business of harmonizing national traditions.[64] Instead, Pöttering intended to highlight European commonalities through the motto of "unity in diversity" and, therefore, "deepening their knowledge [all generations] of their own history."[65] This limbo state of both wanting people to organically understand their commonalities, which the museum would present, while also not wanting to appear as harmonizing any national identities is confusing and conflicting at times with clear ideas and statements Pöttering made about the European integration project and the purpose of the museum.

Although involved and appreciative of certain tangible initiatives, such as Erasmus+ or arts initiatives in the European Union, Pöttering was much more broadly focused on the need for a systematic historical (re)-education for the people, opening new avenues in the community and identity-making in the European Union. His proposal and follow-through for the HEH speaks to his ability to advance such an advanced identity-making project, which is today a prominent staple in the European Union's institutional landscape. Nonetheless, the

[63]   "Hans-Gert Pöttering reflects (in German)," *EU Reporter*, played on April 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahxRvLHU5Z0.

[64]   "Hans-Gert Pöttering: "Europe Needs to Embrace Its Regional and Global Role," *Dianeosis*, 2019.

[65]   Mork and Christodoulou, 2018: 28.

straddling of both lines in harmonization and respecting of individual cultures found its way into the making of the museum, as I show below. His ideas are instrumental in understanding the often-lamented broad narrative the museum espouses.

4. The House of European History (HEH)

In his inaugural presidential address to the European Parliament in February 2007, Pöttering expressed his wish for a space, in which the European people and other international visitors would learn how to be and feel European, and how integration facilitated that process.[66] Below I first briefly describe how the museum looks like today, and then I discuss the process of how the museum went from Pöttering's proposal, incorporating his ideas, and thus reflecting the zeitgeist of ideas that Pöttering established as supranational leader during that time, to actual tangible creation.

4.1. At the HEH

The HEH is the first of its kind museum that discusses Europe's and the European Union's history from a supranational perspective, emphasizing its origins and integration, and without presenting any nation-state specific narratives.[67] The choices made for artefacts, symbols, and inscriptions demonstrate the museum's goal to 'sell' a certain narrative of the EU's shared part, while also getting a sense of where the nation

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[66] "3. Inaugural Address by the President of the European Parliament," 2007; Mork and Christodoulou, 2018.

[67] Jares Jakub, "The House of European History: In Search of a Common History and Its Future," *Cultures of History Forum*, http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/european-union/the-house-of-european-history-in-search-of-a-common-history-and-its-future/, 2017; Kaiser, "Limits of Cultural Engineering: Actors and narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project," 2017; Astrid Van Weyenberg, "Europe" on Display: A Postcolonial Reading of the House of European History," *Politique Europeenne* 66 (2019): 44–71.

is heading towards.[68] The HEH's chosen narrative carries a normative power that instructs its visitors on "what reality really is."[69] The sequential nature of the HEH allows a visitor to essentially 'read a book' and be exposed to a particular story as told by the museum.[70]

The HEH's permanent exhibition is divided into six sections, each covering a distinct historical era in chronological order. The first section, "Shaping Europe," serves as the introductory chapter, highlighting the myth of Europa, the geographical boundaries of Europe, and key aspects of Europe's heritage, including democracy, legal systems, Christianity, and the enlightenment.[71] Its second section, "Europe: A Global Power," focuses on the late 18th century up to the beginnings of World War I, touching upon issues such as the French, industrial, and scientific revolutions, as well as Europe's might as an imperial power. In its third section, "Europe in Ruins," the museum pivots to the two world wars, explaining the rise of totalitarianism, the decline of democracy, National Socialism in Germany, and its collaborators, as well as Stalinism in Russia. The next section, "Rebuilding a Divided Continent" embraces the immediate post-war era until the early 1970s. Here, issues, such as the beginning of the Cold War, social security systems, technological advancements, the divide between the East and the West, and the early days of European integration, are presented and discussed. In its penultimate section, "Shattering Certainties," visitors are guided from the 1970s to the present, addressing events such as the first European Parliament election, further European enlargement, new treaties, the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the European Union in the 21st century. In the museum's sixth and last section, "Europe Now," the objective is to provide an overview of current challenges and concerns that allow a reflection on the prior sections and the values they embody.[72]

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[68]   Aronsson, "Reflections on Policy Relevance and Research in EuNaMus."

[69]   Luke, 220.

[70]   Mieke Ball, *Double Exposures – the Practice of Cultural Analysis* (Milton Park: Routledge, 1996).

[71]   Mork and Christodoulou, 2018.

[72]   This section includes the European Union's 2012 Nobel Peace Prize Medal.

4.2. Making the HEH

After Pöttering's call to action, a team of historians, assembled by the Bureau of the European Parliament, released the *Conceptual Basis for a House of European History* in October 2008.[73] The memo outlined the administrative and academic goals of the museum, agreeing that it should "illustrate both the diversity of Europe and the commonality of its roots."[74] It also stated that "the exhibitions should make clear that, in a world of progress, a united Europe can live together in peace and liberty on the basis of common values."[75] Lastly, it made also clear that museum "should prompt greater citizen involvement in political decision-making process in a united Europe."[76] All these points speak to Pöttering's idea framework that refrained from harmonizing the member-states in an overarching narrative, highlighted the peace-driven mission, and his ambitions to create a mutually constitutive identity-making site for the European Union and its people.

The Conceptual Basis outlined that the team's objective was to portray the community's history in an objective way to maintain the institution's independence. The document insisted it would abstain from retelling individual nation-state narratives but instead emphasize the "European phenomena."[77] The academic team would clarify that the museum would only depict events that originated in Europe, spread across the continent, and which were still relevant today.[78] Initially, the museum's goal was not to be attached to the European Par-

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[73] While no public record exists of discussions/exchanges, the Conceptual Basis for the House of European History states that the Bureau agreed to Pöttering's proposal "following a detailed discussion" ("EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", 2008: 5).

[74] "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", *European Parliament*, December 16, 2008, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=en&type=IMPRESS&reference=20081216IPR44855/: 5.

[75] "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", 2008: 5.

[76] "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", 2008: 5.

[77] "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", 2008: 8.

[78] "Building a House of European History," *European Parliament*, 2013, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/tenders/2013/20130820b/Annex_I-Building_a_House_of_European_History.pdf.

liament. It remained successful until 2016[79] to maintain its academic and administrative independence. At that point, the European Parliament Bureau attached itself closer to the public diplomacy mission of the European Parliament, deciding the museum would follow the parliament's communication guidelines in any outward press releases to experts and the public.[80]

The initial draft of the Conceptual Basis outlined three distinct time periods: the pre-19th century era, which highlighted shared European themes of migration, trade, financial and economic centers, colonial empires, education of the Middle Ages, the Westphalian state, and national emancipations;[81] the 'Europe and the World Wars' era, which spoke to the trajectory of World War I, international developments (i.e., the League of Nations, the Kellogg–Briand Pact), the rise of Hitler, and the events of World War II; and lastly, the post-World War II era, beginning with the Conference of Yalta, the economic growth of the 1950 and 1960s, the rise and fall of the USSR, technologies and scientific advancements, the Eastern European Union expansion, and the creation of the European Union.[82] The memo leaves the future of the European Union open, inviting dialogue and questions.[83] Although avoiding a too narrow focus on the European Union, ultimately the narrative presented bookends a list of European crises with the creation of the international organization in a teleological fashion.[84] The Conceptual Basis was sent to Pöttering in September 2008 for review.[85]

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[79]   "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", 2008.

[80]   Mork and Christodoulou, 2018.

[81]   Notably, this section was defined by the Greco-Roman high culture, its Judeo-Christian traditions, and the overarching role of Christianity in political and cultural issues across Europe. This initial draft, then, provided a clear cultural demarcation that outlined an 'origin' of Europe, which to the visitors should illuminate the bedrock on which European values were founded on ("EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", 2008).

[82]   "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", 2008.

[83]   "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"", 2008.

[84]   Mark and Christodoulou, 2018; Van Weyenberg, "Europe" on Display: A Postcolonial Reading of the House of European History," 2019.

[85]   "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"," 2008; "Project aiming at the Foundation of a House of European History: State of Play, Background Briefing

On December 15th, 2008, the European Parliament Bureau approved the memo, asking Pöttering to draft an administrative structure for the museum, including a board of trustees and an academic committee.[86] Candidates were approved by the Bureau in February 2009, naming Pöttering the chair of the board of trustees.[87] Pöttering later reflected on his exhaustive input, convincing colleagues in the European Union of the plan for the HEH, relying on his political capital and his allies.[88] Notable board members included representatives from the Culture and Education committees in the Parliament and the Commission as well as the parliament's head of the Budget committee.[89] This composition on the board illustrates how intrinsically the European Union itself was involved in the museum's development right from the beginning – and just starting in 2016.

Between 2009 and 2011, the Academic Committee, made up of historians from across Europe,[90] met up several times to assess the Conceptual Basis and its practical implementation.[91] The Committee's initial "lively"[92] meetings considered the proposal and outside concerns sent to Pöttering. For instance, the Bishop's Conference of the European Community promoted more emphasis of Christianity. In another instance, thirteen members of the European Parliament

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for the Committee on Culture and Education," European Parliament, March 7, 2011, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/cult/dv/houseeuropeanhistorybriefing/houseeuropeanhistorybriefingen.pdf#:~:text=It%20was%20also%20presented%20to%20and%20approved%20by,to%20start%20the%20preparatory%20work%20for%20its%20realisation)

[86] "Project aiming at the Foundation of a House of European History: State of Play, Background Briefing for the Committee on Culture and Education," 2011.

[87] At that point he was no longer the head of the European Parliament but remained in a leadership position at the museum.

[88] Monk and Christodoulou, 2018.

[89] "Project Aiming at the Foundation of a House of European History: State of Play, Background Briefing for the Committee on Culture and Education," 2011.

[90] See for full list: "Project Aiming at the Foundation of a House of European History: State of Play, Background Briefing for the Committee on Culture and Education," 2011.

[91] Monk and Christodoulou, 2018.

[92] Monk and Christodoulou, 2018: 92.

"stated no less than 22 objections against the Conceptual Basis."[93] The Committee created leading principles, which in turn framed the making of the HEH. Emphasizing the "need to identify a common heritage was put forward,"[94] they put forward that museum's purpose was to "presenting the 'soul' and emotional levels of European history"[95] to the European people.

Embracing Pöttering's wish to educate the European people about their shared historical foundation, the Academic Committee's principles aligned with these visions. Delegating to the Academic Project Team (APT), the day-to-day team made a significant change in late March 2011, reframing the Committee's goal of shaping a 'European identity' to a 'cultural memory of Europe,' thus choosing to opt for the less controversial terminology. In that, the museum's APT aimed to maintain its desire to portray objective and commonly known facts.[96]

This significant change was further justified by the museum's leadership as an attempt to come across less authoritarian, stating that the HEH "cannot be a stage for the presentation of a pre-defined European identity."[97] The museum also opposed the claim that it wanted to invent traditions, arguing that the museum was formed "through a process of communication, in the light of public discussion."[98] Little evidence though is available that speaks to Pöttering's desire to maintain open communication between the institution and the public.

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[93]   The exact language and content of these letters could not have been verified independently through primary resources and relies entirely on Monk and Christodoulou's (2018: 92) recap of the making of the museum.

[94]   Monk and Christodoulou, 2018: 93.

[95]   Ibid.

[96]   "Project aiming at the foundation of a House of European History: State of Play, Background briefing for the Committee on Culture and Education," 2011; "Presentation of the House of European History," *European Network Remembrance and Solidarity*, August 20, 2012, https://enrs.eu/article/presentation-of-the-house-of-european-history.

[97]   "EP Bureau decides to set up a "House of European History"," 2008; "Presentation of the House of European History," 2012; "Hans-Gert Pöttering: "Europe Needs to Embrace Its Regional and Global Role"", *Dianeosis*, 2019.

[98]   "Presentation of the House of European History," 2012.

The museum leadership provided some examples, yet I was not able to verify them via secondary sources.[99] One of the examples includes the first public introduction to the museum at the 2011 European Parliament Day, at which leaflets were handed out to visitors. Here, the museum received 140 responses to an unspecified questionnaire, giving "a taste of a wide feeling and reflection on the project."[100]

Pöttering remained purposefully mum on the issue – at least until January 2012. He insisted on not informing the Commission and the Council about the progress of the museum until "a later stage, when the project could no longer be called into question."[101] He only spoke to Barroso on several occasions about the project, who in turn spoke favorably about the meetings and committed a significant sum in 2011 by the Commission.[102] To avoid other political games, which could harm the progress of the museum, he waited until the European Parliament approved the budget in 2012 to publicize the museum more broadly. In January 2012, he gave the first press conference.[103] This decision allowed him to limit the scope of the debate and possibilities for change.

In 2013, the museum released an updated booklet, "Building a House of European History" on the work it had done so far. The APT decided to focus extensively on the 20th century, limiting the efforts of the Conceptual Basis to highlight the 'early days.' To understand

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[99] In another example, Mork and Christodoulou, two members of the APT recalled that "From the beginning, the whole team was regularly involved in discussions about the content. Although, the colleagues joining the from the European Parliament different fields of work, some of them in fact were also historians. It was important to hear voices of other professions, but more important to hear the voices of our potential public. We listened to discussions and views from very different collective and individual experiences, from people coming from many European countries, east, south, north, west. This was one of the best experiences – to bring the team not only to a wider understanding of different national experiences, but also to try to reflect this experience at a transnational level." (Mork and Christodoulou, 2018: 98).

[100] Monk and Christodoulou, 2018: 97.

[101] Mork and Christodoulou, 2018: 24.

[102] Mork and Christodoulou, 2018.

[103] Mork and Christodoulou, 2018.

"the tumultuous events of the 20th century,"[104] the permanent exhibition would outline in a prior section a lead-up to frame what made Europe 'European.' Although not speaking in the booklet what that would entail, I demonstrate in the brief outline above that the lead-up section or 'the before era' implemented in broad strokes Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian influences in the community, as well as the shared experiences of revolutions, emancipations, and industrialization. Together, these events form the bedrock of shared "historical consciousness" in Europe.[105] In 2011, the Academic Committee had advised the APT to advance their research about Eastern Europe, which the APT addressed in the booklet, clarifying that each museum section would discuss the center and periphery of an event.[106]

Except for the British Press, which called the museum a "grossly narcissistic project"[107] and called into question the cost, the museum stayed largely outside of the public's eye until its opening in 2017. Pöttering's strategy of "distraction and confusion"[108] seemingly worked.[109] Individual parliamentarians spoke out after the opening, criticizing the project's costs. Representatives from the Netherlands argued that "a parliament should not be funding a museum" or that it was a "shameless, a pathetic form of propaganda."[110] Individual countries and organizations also voiced their disdain for the way the museum had chosen to represent Europe's history. Jares[111] called it an "empty shrine" for Europe, shallowly picking events that fit a narra-

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[104] "Building a House of European History," 2013: 6.

[105] "Building a House of European History", 2013: 24.

[106] "Building a House of European History", 2013.

[107] Bruno Waterfield, "House of European History' Cost estimates Double to £137 Million," *The Telegraph,* 3 April 2011.

[108] Mork and Christodoulou, 2018: 324.

[109] The House of European History has acknowledged these types of criticism by the British press, defining them as "Europhobic" (Mork and Christodoulou, 2018); Waterfield, 2011; Jakub, 2017.

[110] As quoted in: Van Weyenberg, ""Europe" on Display: A Postcolonial reading of the House of European History", 2019: 45.

[111] Jakub, "The House of European History: In Search of a Common History and its Future," 2017.

tive, overemphasizing World War II, the Holocaust, and its aftermath. Rankin[112] speaks also here about an over 'Germanness' to the museum. Poland objected to the narrative that the country had collaborated with the Nazis during the Holocaust. Following a visit to the museum, the international nongovernmental organization Platform of European Memory and Conscience submitted a memo, in which they spoke about similar issues of overrepresenting some and no other countries. Here, they criticized the perceived banality of the atrocities of the Soviet Union regime, the underselling of some key European leaders; they also claimed that some information was falsified According to the NGO, their team of Eastern European scholars had offered to assist the HEH in 2012, but their proposal was rejected.[113]

In 2013, the European Parliament released a booklet titled "Building the House of European History" which gave an overview[114] of the creation process, its purpose, and its progress.[115] At that point, the booklet did not invite conversation but rather was a status-quo report. That same year, the French architectural firm Chaix & Morel was hired to design the project in the Eastman Building in Brussels. Although, the plan was to open the museum's doors in 2015, ultimately the museum was opened on May 6th, 2017.[116]

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[112] Jennifer Rankin, "Brexit through the Gift Shop: Museum of European History divides Critics," *The Guardian,* 12 August 2018.

[113] Albeit the APT growing over team to roughly thirty core team members, ultimately the circle had been kept small to facilitate efficiently the making of the museum: Mork and Christodoulou, 2018; Pawel Ukielski, Monika Kareniauskaite, Yana Hrynko, "The House of European History. Report on the Permanent Exhibition," *Platform of European Memory and Conscience, 2017,* https://www.memoryandconscience.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Report-on-the-HEH-by-the-Platform-of-European-Memory-and-Conscience-30.10.2017.pdf; "Andrzej Duda o UE: Wyimaginowana wspólnota, z której dla nas niewiele wynika," *Dziennik.pl*, 11 September 2018, http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/580955,prezydent-andrzej-duda-ue-wyimaginowana-wspolnota-lezajsk.html.

[114] In the 24 official EU languages.

[115] "Building a House of European History," 2013.

[116] Taja Vovk van Gaal and Christine Dupont, "The House of European History," *Entering the Minefields: The Creation of New History Museums in Europe,* ed. by Bodil Axelsson, Christine Dupont & Chantal Kesteloot (EuNaMus Report 9, 2012): 43–55.

Discussion and conclusions:

The HEH is the product of a set of ideas. Pöttering utilized his tenure and supranational position to propose more tangible and real-life solutions to the missing "soul" problem the European Union faces. He recognized a strength in the European Union, which he believed the member-states should utilize to address on-going and future problems. In an ever-globalized world, individual states could no longer address transnational issues on their own. The lack of cultural integration hindered this process, which is why Pöttering proposed and acted upon tangible issues to instill their understanding of the European community's identity. Here he relied on the belief that there was an innate commonality based on liberal values, Christianity, and Greek and Roman traditions. The European community only had to be awakened to this understanding to view the European Union and their fellow citizens in a clearer light. Through education and accessibility, this elite leader was convinced that it would not only create a moment of awakening but in turn also make the European people much more interested in the European Union integration project, thus coming on board, and become part of the mutually constitutive process of making a European identity.

It gets complicated, though, when we look closer at how Pöttering limited himself in his understanding of common identity. He acknowledged that the possibility of dual identities was feasible, but he was hesitant to advocate for genuine harmonization of identities through tangible projects. Instead, he aimed for both a harmonization process at the supranational level, while simultaneously also advancing historical awakening at the member-state level. This ultimately means that he envisioned two sorts of European narratives, which complicate the way the European identity is framed and presented in the HEH, which is the most tangible and notable outcome of the European Union's identity efforts.

I illustrate that not only was Pöttering instrumental on getting the ball rolling on the HEH, but he was from the beginning intrinsically

involved in the making of it – first as both the president of the European Parliament and the head of the board of trustees, later "just" in the role of the latter. The museum's trajectory in creating and work-shopping the narrative, which also includes the rejection of outside influences and the relatively shrine of secrecy around the project to present a more finalized project, and thus, thwart of any sort of influence that might derail the project.

His complicated set of "unity in diversity" ideas is visible in the trajectory of the making of the project. Whereas the initial Conceptual Basis is relatively concrete in its ideas and goals for the museum, allowing itself to more genuinely harmonize narratives, the hesitations and choices of the Academic Team along the way – most notably changing "identity" to "memory" – speak to the want to again straddle a fine line between acceptance and not upsetting the member-states too much, who in individual cases were already not pleased by the goals of the museum. Inadvertently, this in-between status has, as I show above, upset some of the member-states, nonetheless, because of differing expectations in what the museum ought to be for the European Union, its member-states, and its citizens.

The falling back on tried tropes of liberal values and broad strokes of European history harmonize in a sense the European people, because these parts of the museum exhibition argue for shared suffering, rejoicing, and rebuilding. But at the same time, the narrative told in the museum is not novel or evokes an emotional response in the people that would aim to amplify more intense identity feelings. Instead, these tenets utilized evoke a sense of transactional identity in the European Union, meaning that (non-European specific) liberal values dominate and the European Union is presented in a teleological manner as the subsequent step in Europe's conflict-ridden history. The museum, thus, becomes not only a broad narrative making tool for a shallow European identity but it also functions as a tool to "sell" the European Union to a people who may (1) not understand its purpose and achievements, and (2) whose legitimacy the European Union relies upon. In that, the museum is a manifestation of Pöttering's

need to have people understand the organization's value, and of his desire for the Union to embody its strength on the international stage.

Pöttering is mentioned in all works on the House of European History as the originator of the project. Yet, in that context it is rarely discussed what his thoughts and ideas were regarding the European Union, integration, and identity. Instead, it is just assumed that he must have been "pro-European," without providing adequate context to what that may have meant for the supranational leader. The failure to incorporate that in the discussion on the museum is confusing, given how more and more scholarship is generated on European identity and narrative making when discussing the expansion of the European project – especially considering on-going domestic and international crises, which challenge the foundation of this supranational organization. Diving into elite leader ideas and how they shape EU organization sheds light on what possibilities and limitations exist in its cultural integration. It also allows us to see the museum's narrative in identity-making not simply as an occurrence but rather as a deliberate outcome of a policy decision-making process. Given the elite-level technocratic nature of the European Union, this requires more investigation to understand how elite-leaders envisioned and foresee this ever-evolving peace organization.

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