

EU Politics of Remembrance

Short Report of Jean Monnet EuCuMe Roundtables

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Until the beginning of the 1990s, the EU Institutions promoted a celebratory style that focused mainly on two aspects: the exaltation of a “common cultural heritage” (“European cultural heritage”) and the dissemination of knowledge related to moments and great figures (“founding fathers”) who have marked the stages of process of European integration, for example Jean Monnet, or Robert Schuman. It is important to be aware that this type of celebration can hardly arouse strong emotional involvement, except in people with more education. Likewise, few of you know who Robert Schuman was, what contribution he made to the construction of Europe, or rather that 9 May is Europe Day (Declaration Schuman, delivered on 9 May 1950 by Robert Schuman, the then foreign minister of the French government, in which reference is made for the first time to the construction of a European economic and political union). These are “cold” memories, linked to a not very usable idea of a common cultural heritage and to an altogether elitist concept of “high culture”.

The European Institutions themselves seem to have realized this problem and changed approach. Since 1990s, the commemoration of “negative memories”, or memories centered on traumatic episodes, linked above all to the Second World War, became more important in European memory policies. These are events that are closer to the lives of people, of which, in one way or another, we have heard of if not from one of our family members, at least at school, or of whom we have some knowledge, even if confused.

Among these traumatic events, the most traumatic of all is the Holocaust. Since the 1990s, the Holocaust has taken a central position in building a sense of European belonging. In an international climate that pays increasing attention to this issue, the Holocaust becomes the cornerstone of official discourses concerning European memory and collective identity. This process culminates in the Resolution of the European Parliament of 27 January 2005, with which, on the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the official date for the commemoration of the Holocaust (*European Holocaust Memorial Day*) is identified on 27 January; a date that will then be adopted in November of the same year also by the United Nations for the celebration of the *International Holocaust Remembrance Day*.