

European Network Remembrance and Solidarity (ENRS)

Guidelines for international discourse on history and memory

Historical memory is one of the cornerstones in the identity and heritage of individuals and communities. It plays a fundamental role in shaping the relationships between countries and peoples, and may also be a source of tension and conflict.

Initiatives such as permanent and temporary museum exhibitions, monuments, literary works, documentaries and historical films, websites and other creative works aimed at directly or indirectly developing a historical view of one or more peoples and states, are tools in international historical discourse.

These types of activities, which are influenced by political factors, be it directly – through commissioning projects, or indirectly – for example through participation in project financing, become acts of international politics of memory.

Considering the promotion of peace and the development of international cooperation, alongside the strengthening of democracy and human rights, as the overriding goals of international policy in the 21st century, and in the firm belief that the criteria of objectivism, openness and tolerance are the best means of depicting reality, including historical reality, we formulate the following guidelines for international historical discourse and international politics of memory:

1. Present varied viewpoints

Those developing initiatives in international historical discourse and international politics of memory should strive to ensure such presentation of historical events that reliably takes into account the viewpoints, reasoning and arguments of all those involved in such events. Affirmative presentation of totalitarian, racist and chauvinistic visions of the world and of history is unacceptable.

2. Avoid deterministic expressions

Those developing the above initiatives should ensure that they avoid suggesting to audiences that there is an inevitable dependence between historical events and the current relations between peoples and states.

3. Avoid generalisations

The content of all international politics of memory initiatives should be commensurate with the nature and scope of the historical phenomena they concern. Individual facts with positive or negative significance, even if in themselves historically verified, should not be used to illustrate the attitudes and conduct of an entire community. Each such fact should be presented in a context reflecting its actual place in the history of a given community.

4. Treat historical figures as individuals

In order to avoid fostering and spreading stereotypes which could be applied to entire communities, when portraying both commendable historical actions and crimes, those developing international historical discourse and international politics of memory initiatives should make every effort to ensure that the persons behind such actions/perpetrators are identified as precisely as possible and presented in an individualised manner.

5. Ensure a genuine historical basis

The inclusion of completely fictional storylines in works about history poses the risk of consciously or unconsciously distorting presentation of the past. For this reason, those developing such works should make every effort to ensure that the figures and events presented correspond as closely as possible to the historical context.

6. Clearly define the nature of each initiative

In order to facilitate the audience's interpretation of international historical discourse and international politics of memory initiatives, those developing such initiatives should make every effort to clearly inform the audience of the work's position as historical documentation, fiction, a historical work of fiction or other, depending on the relationship between the fictional storylines in their works and historical and documentary elements.

7. Use academic knowledge as your source

With regard to historical context, each international historical discourse and international politics of memory initiative should be based on current academic findings applicable to its content. During development, the content of such initiatives should be discussed with recognised academic experts representing specialist knowledge on a given phenomenon. The extent of academic consultation should be adequate to the planned project and its budget. All those developing initiatives are required to confirm that academic consultation has taken place in a specific scope, and to include the name of the consultant in the information on a given initiative (e.g. opening/closing credits of a film, exhibition programme).

8. Apply up-to-date didactical concepts and technical standards

When presenting texts, visual materials (images, films, maps), audio material or artifacts, try to apply didactical concepts that are state of the art and that enable the audience to experience varied viewpoints. Follow international standards and guidelines when indicating your sources and creating an adequate context environment for your material. Be aware of the implications that information in its digital form needs a specific hypertextual structure and a sustainable technological basis. In case there is too little expertise given the task that is planned, try to co-operate with experts on didactics and informatics.

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