

13 October 2019

Dear colleagues,

On its 24th anniversary today, it is useful to recall that the Network of Concerned Historians (NCH) draws its inspiration from the International Committee of Historical Sciences (ICHS).

The first article of the ICHS *Constitution* reads: “It [The Committee] shall defend freedom of thought and expression in the field of historical research and teaching, and is opposed to the misuse of history and shall use every means at its disposal to ensure the ethical professional conduct of its members.”

From 23 to 29 August 2020, the ICHS will organize its 23rd International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznan, Poland. An overview of the congress program is [here](#). At the congress, I will organize a Round Table with the title **Limits to Free Expression about the Past**. I hope that many of you can attend it.

The Round Table is based on a paper written by the organizer:

Memory and Tradition as Limits to the Free Expression about History.

It can be downloaded [here](#) [pdf; 30 pages]. Comments are welcome.

Abstract — Society has a strong interest in a robust public debate about history and this interest even increases in the case of past public figures, in the case of victims of atrocity crimes, and with the passage of time. From an international human rights perspective, the free expression about history can be restricted only under carefully determined circumstances and narrowly formulated conditions in the service of a few explicit purposes. Memory and tradition are *not* among these purposes. However, memory and tradition can be reframed in terms of permissible purposes with relative ease: “respect for the memory of the dead” can be rephrased as an application of “respect of the rights or reputations of others,” and “protection of the tradition of the ancestors” as a form of “public morals.” With these reframing options in mind, I balanced the interests of history, memory, and tradition against each other. Within strict limits, “memory” can be seen as a guarantee for reputation and privacy, and “tradition” as a guarantee for morals. If that is the case, memory and tradition act as acceptable checks on how a society deals with its past. Memory and tradition then trump history. In all other cases – the large majority – they are problematic limits: in overprotecting them, memory and tradition distort and censor talk about the past. Memory and tradition then trample history.

You can consult the NCH website also for: campaigns for historians ([here](#)); worldwide Annual Reports (25 to date, [here](#)); thematic documents of international organizations relevant to historians ([here](#)); legal cases related to the past, to time, to memory, to history, and to historians ([here](#)); and codes of ethics for historians ([here](#)), archaeologists ([here](#)), and archivists ([here](#)).

With best wishes,

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