

„Du hast den Farbfilm vergessen...”¹

A Visit to the House of European History on 22 May 2025

We still know what color film is! The American George Eastman made a fortune with it. He came from a poor background and was so traumatized by inadequate dental care as a child that he later established children's dental care centers all over the world. The Belgian architect Michel Polak built the Eastman Building in Parc Leopold for him. The Eastman Building is an elegant Art Deco building, similar to Polak's neighboring



Residence Palace and his Villa Empain.

Large murals depicting fairytale scenes in the entrance area were intended to entertain and calm the waiting children. Until the 1970s, children were brought to the Eastman Building in class for dental check-ups. Today, the House of European History is located there. A children's dentist's chair on display in the museum commemorates its original purpose. Upon exiting the elevator, we are greeted in the stairwell by a metal spiral extending across all floors, symbolizing the writing of history.

Dr. Manuel Schmitz explained all this to us during his 90-minute tour of the museum, which is largely located in the modern annex. Us, this is the Brussels Stammtisch, or round table, of AIACE Germany. Manuel emphasized that it is a museum of European history and not a museum of the EU.

On the second floor, we began with geography. Various world maps demonstrate how accustomed we have become to a Eurocentric representation of the world. On a Chinese map, however, China, as the Middle Kingdom, is located at the center, pushing Europe to the periphery. On an Australian world map, Australia is shown at the top and Europe at the bottom of the map. This change in perspective certainly challenges our worldview.



¹ Nina Hagen, it is one of her hit songs in the GDR, it was played in honour of Angela Merkel when she left office; translation „You forgot the colour film...”

Other exhibits demonstrate Europe's influence on the rest of the world. We saw exhibits documenting the beginnings of nation-states after the French Revolution, as well as those depicting 19th-century industrialization. The Communist Manifesto is also on display. Karl Marx remains an important figure in Asian China today. The Chinese government presented a giant statue of Marx to Trier, Marx's birthplace.

Next, we move on to the busts of the fathers (they are, in fact, only fathers) of the European Union, each of whom has been assigned a typical object. Interestingly, almost all of the men came from multicultural backgrounds. The Italian Prime Minister de Gasperi grew up in what was then Austrian Trentino and spoke fluent German. Bech, a Luxembourger, and Spaak, a Belgian, came from countries that already incorporate different cultures. The inventor and "mastermind" of the ECSC, Jean Monnet, was a well-traveled cognac producer and spoke fluent English. Robert Schuman was born German; his native language was Luxembourgish. He studied law in Bonn and opted for French citizenship after the First World War. Displayed beneath Schuman's bust is a copy of the false papers he used to go into hiding after the German occupation of France. He was, after all, a true European. Of course, Adenauer, too, has a bust dedicated to him. However, he was the exception and spoke no foreign language.

Next, we strolled through the Cold War: the USSR on the left and the USA on the right, while Europe was developing in the middle. At the end of this corridor, an atrium opens. In its center lies a book several meters long, open: the complete *Acquis Communautaire*! We all know it, but more as an abstract concept. Here it is, within easy reach. Some of us would have liked to look up the legislation they had helped to create at the time. It was not possible to determine the language in which the exhibit was written.

Finally, Manuel showed us a sweater. This sweater belonged to Radu Ioniescu. He



demonstrated for freedom in Romania in December 1989. He was murdered by the Securitate. Radu was 17 years old. The bullet hole from a firearm is clearly visible on the sweater, and another hole is the result of a bayonet stab. Radu's mother donated this sweater to the museum. This sweater touched all of us in a special way. Freedom cannot be taken for granted. Europe is not just a Europe of institutions, but a Europe of

every single citizen.

Our thanks go to Manuel, who, through his careful selection of topics and exhibits, created an inspiring and educational afternoon for us. Many of us will certainly return. And some of us rounded off this inspiring afternoon at a pastry shop.



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