



#defendhistory

DEFEND HISTORY
- DECLARATION -

In the states established after the breakup of the SFRY, there has been a pronounced revisionist attitude towards the past. Historical revisionism is an abuse of history, an intentional and tendentious distortion of past events. It implies adapting the past to modern political demands, isolating and emphasising desirable data and fabricating the truth, selecting historical sources, editing out everything that does not suit the ruling political ideas and programmes. In contrast, there are desirable advances of existing knowledge, discoveries of new historical sources and new interpretations of those already known, new methodologies and paradigms as well as constant reviews and recontextualisation, which are essential components of the work of historians.

Every country has its politics of history, but nationalist ideologies and the Yugoslav Wars have given rise to a particularly pronounced abuse of history in the countries formed after the breakup of the SFRY. History has been used for psychological preparation for war as well as for maintaining various policies based on the exploitation of nationalist passions even in the post-war period. History has been abused by the politicians, the media, interest

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groups and even historians themselves.

Historical revisionism aims to maintain old myths and create new ones, reinforce stereotypes, cultivate prejudice and hatred towards neighbours. 'We' are always the victims, 'they' are always to blame. Self-victimisation has been used to create a paranoid historicistic approach that frees the victim of all scruples and feeds the desire for revenge. Self-victimisation has been used to homogenise a nation, close ranks, annihilate plurality and submerge individuals and social groups in an imaginary 'biological' or 'spiritual' collective. Playing the victim leaves us stuck in the past and prevents progress.

All post-SFRY countries have manipulated the history of the Second World War. Historical revisionism has removed proven facts and replaced them with assertions that have no foundation in historical sources. This has erased clear moral coordinates from our society along with the distinction between fascism and anti-fascism, creating a danger of repeating the atrocities of the past.

Today, history is a platform for continuing the Yugoslav Wars by other means. These wars are on their way to becoming subject to political manipulation just like the Second World War. Anniversaries and jubilees are used for nationalist mobilisation and solidifying authoritarian governments. There is no compassion or empathy for 'their' victims. Nearly thirty years have passed, yet not one of the belligerent states has even attempted to take responsibility for the part it played in these wars. Today, history is an active

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source of smouldering hostilities that are destroying our societies.

Therefore, we must stand up in defence of history and do everything in our power to stop its abuse.

We, the undersigned, stand by the following principles:

1. History is a science.

History is not a figment of an arbitrary opinion and must be based on historical research, verifying and collating historical sources, establishing precise and verifiable facts, their analysis and synthesis.

2. History is dynamic.

Like any other science, history keeps acquiring new knowledge, discovering new historical sources, piecing them together and interpreting them. The result of new research is historical revision. However, historical revisionism is manipulating historical facts to achieve a political goal.

3. History is a discipline of critical thinking.

History is not a taboo whose purpose is to strengthen nationalist feelings or identity politics nor to spread stereotypes and prejudices. History should teach us how to verify information as well as how to recognise manipulation and abuse of the past.

4. History employs a multi-perspective approach.

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Historical facts are established through scientific methods but can be interpreted differently because interpretation depends on the point of view. This does not mean that the past can be relativized. It means that the interpretation of the past is open to debate in which relevant data and opposing opinions must be considered without hiding facts that do not fit in with a politically desired narrative.

5. History is comprehensive.

We must not hold on to what we like in the past and discard what does not suit our current political needs! There must not be a politically and ideologically conditioned selection, a suitable and unsuitable historical period, state, nation, social group, idea, movement...

6. History is transnational.

History must not be confined by ethnic boundaries. We cannot deal exclusively with ourselves because we will lose touch with reality. The past is entangled, interconnected and interdependent. Nations, states and social groups are born, exist and develop through mutual contacts. It is only in this complexity and interdependence that we can understand the present and the past.

7. History is contextual.

The past, like the present, cannot be understood in isolation, taken out of context, reduced to a single issue. Past reality was influenced by many factors, so confining it to a narrow frame is manipulating history

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and preventing historians from understanding the past and collaborating with each other.

8. History is rational.

History is not a myth, a dogma, a religion, an ideology, an emotion. One does not believe in it, judge it, accuse it, or cheer for it. History studies the past to comprehend it and explain it. It teaches us how to understand the complexity of the past to be able to face the present and assess the future rationally.

9. History is free.

Like every other scientific discipline, history can progress only if research is free from any political, ideological, religious or economic pressure. There are no suitable and unsuitable historians, '*patriots*' or '*traitors*'!

10. History is responsible.

The present is built on perceptions of the past. The present is in danger if the past is abused, if it is withheld, if something that did not happen is added to it, and if what did happen is 'forgotten' or relativized. This creates a false vision of the present, making us incapable of perceiving and therefore resolving its issues. Historians must be socially responsible.

We, the undersigned, therefore demand:

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Engaging Words

1. **That historians** adhere to fact-checking standards and fight for the application of scientific historiographic methods, especially when it comes to sensitive and controversial subjects relating to the past;
2. **That political elites** pursue responsible politics of history, stop abusing the past and relying on historians, intellectuals and interest groups that fuel nationalist passions and cause rifts among us to strengthen their political positions;
3. **That parliaments, both domestic and European**, stop passing laws, resolutions, preambles and other acts that impose 'historical truth' or convenient interpretations of the past. By doing so they become directly involved in the customisation of history and dangerous manipulation of the past;
4. **That courts of justice**, when applying laws, care about established historical facts and do not contribute to reinforcing pseudo-history and the rehabilitation of proven Second World War collaborators and those responsible for war crimes in recent history;
5. **That ministries of science** encourage and financially support projects that will freely and critically research all topics of scientific interest, even those that concern dark and controversial aspects of national history, and financially support joint scientific projects in neighbouring countries to help develop a multi-perspective approach to past events;

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6. **That ministries of education** stop turning history into a subject whose sole purpose is to form a national identity and spread hatred. History should be a leading subject in critical thinking, based exclusively on modern approaches to history education in which there are no taboos. Ministries should support the exchange of university professors and schoolteachers;
7. **That ministries of culture and all government authorities responsible for the politics of memory** abandon the practice of raising monuments and opening new museums dedicated to individuals or organisations that participated in spreading hatred and atrocities. Such politics of memory only spread and foster hatred, tensions and impassioned homogenisations;
8. **That the media** be responsible to the past, critical of parahistorians and historians who promote intolerance and distort the past, that they refrain from publishing unverified information, stop withholding historical facts and stop using the past to fuel antagonistic policies;
9. **That local governments** stop naming schools, streets, student halls and other public buildings after individuals who called for ethnic hatred and anti-Semitism and were responsible for war crimes in the Second World War and recent wars;
10. **That history teachers** keep up with new methods of teaching history, practice competencies and critical thinking with students,

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encourage students to work with historical sources and challenge every assertion about the past. The absence of critical thinking in history classes reinforces authoritarian consciousness and exclusivity in young people.

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