

Learning@Europe



L@E Content: Interviews to Experts

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L@E Content: Interviews to Experts

The Interviews

No less **innovative** than the technological infrastructure is the **content** provided to students who take part in a L@E experience: **interviews** to leading European historians, sociologists, experts of political sciences, offering a thought-provoking, multifaceted view of historical phenomena all across Europe.

The interview “format” has many strong points:

- although the original transcript goes through multiple steps of refinement, the final text retains the freshness of the original colloquium and the question/answer rhythm, giving vent to a pleasurable reading and facilitating comprehension of complex issues;
- the written documents stem from an oral conversation: the expert talks in a direct and straightforward language, making limited use of technical jargon, or no use at all;
- pressed by not-always-canonical questions, the expert goes directly to the core issues, skipping cumbersome details;
- students receive a set of interviews granted by scholars who express different points of view of the same issues: unlike school textbooks, which tend to give a unique and fixed picture of history, interviews introduce the reader into “a debate at academic level”.

The original language, as well as the original English “style” used by non native speaker, have been preserved to a certain extent, as a testimony of the growth of a “European English” (with all the local differences, of course!).

During a 2-months L@E experience, students read a set of approximately 9 interviews, building a **common ground** that otherwise would be missing: due to the current organization of national history curricula, students know little outside the history of their own country. All discussions, as well as the “testing” (questions, quizzes and assignment), are based on this common background material.

L@E Subject Matter

Learning@Europe is about history; it addresses the topic of **the birth of nation-states**, which took place all over Europe, approximately in the same period. This is the ideal ground for confrontation and discovery of analogies and differences, swinging from various local perspectives (what happened in *one* country) to a global, European view (how the *same* phenomenon affected the different European countries).

Interviews can be roughly divided into two main groups:

1. Some interviews are “**nation-centred**”: they tell the story of a specific country (with special attention to the historical period in which it became a nation-state). In this way, students from different European countries can learn the basic facts of their peers’ history (about Poland, Italy, France, and so on).
2. Other interviews deal with “**transversal**” **issues and historical processes**, that in some way or another affected all Europe; currently we are dealing with the concept of national identity (how it is created, what are its key elements, what role symbols play in this process...), and new challenging topics are under development. Finally, a very small set of interviews introduces history as a discipline, exploring its significance and methods.

The Scientific Committee

The cultural “policy” of L@E is by all means its most crucial aspect. A distinguished scientific committee is in charge of steering all the cultural choices in Learning@Europe.

Since year **2006–07**, the committee is composed by:

- prof. Alberto **Martinelli** (Università Statale di Milano; **Italy**)
- prof. Yves **Mény** (President of the European University Institute, Florence; **Italy**).
- prof. Heinz-Gerhard **Haupt**, (Universität Bielefeld, **Germany**; European University Institute, Department of History and Civilization, Italy)

The initial scientific committee (formed in year **2004–05**) included the following scholars, ideally representing the countries and areas involved at that time:

- Alberto Martinelli, Professor of Political Sciences at the Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy (coordinator)
- Margaret Archer, President of the International Sociological Association, Founding member of the Academy of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences, UK
- Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, Professor of Social History of European Institutions and Cultures, University of Sevilla, Spain; European University Institute, Department of History and Civilization, Italy
- Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Professor of Methodology of Comparative History, Universität Bielefeld, Germany; European University Institute, Department of History and Civilization, Italy
- Bo Strath, Professor of Contemporary History, European University Institute, Italy – Norway
- Marek Ziolkowski, Institute of Sociology, Poznan University, Poland; President, UNESCO/MOST Intergovernmental Council

19 experts¹ have been interviewed up to now (July 2007): the editorial process on interview transcripts has led to the creation of **more than 50 documents**, still retaining the “question/answer” style. New interviews are being planned, to cover the history of new participating countries.

The experts have different backgrounds (sociology, politics, history, in some cases literature and philosophy) and different geographical provenance. In the interviews they express in a particularly lively manner their personal point of view and way of thinking. Entering in this virtual arena, students are thus stimulated to compare, discuss, take position, that is: develop critical thinking.

¹ A comprehensive list is available for download