

SCHIRMECK-Alsace

# MEMORIAL

*Press Release*

# ALSACE MOSELLE

**NEW PERMANENT EXHIBITION**

**Europe's Journey**



**Grand Est**  
ALSACE CHAMPAGNE-ARDENNE LORRAINE



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# *The powerful message of a tremendous century!*



The Alsace-Moselle Memorial tells the unique story of the people of the Alsace and Moselle regions.

In 1999, then-President of the Local Council of the Bas-Rhin département Philippe Richert, and Jean-Pierre Massert, Secretary of State of the Defence at the time, took a decisive position: the Alsace-Moselle Memorial would truly be created, and it would be built in Schirmeck.

There were several reasons for this choice:

Located midway between Strasbourg and St-Dié-des-Vosges, Schirmeck is at the crossroads of the Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin and Vosges départements.

In August 1940, at the very beginning of the annexation, the Nazis opened an internment camp at Schirmeck.

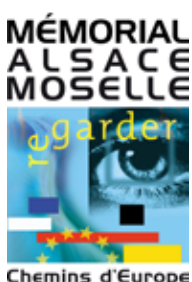
Moreover, the site of the Memorial faces Struthof, the former concentration camp, as well as the European Centre of the Deported Resistance Members, located on the other side of the valley.

The proximity of the two sites, as well as their complementary tour visits, makes the memorial a must-see on any visit to Alsace.

Since January 2000, a joint association has managed the Memorial. It is now financed by the Grand Est Region, the Bas-Rhin and Haut-Rhin départements, the Bruche Valley Community of Towns and the Town of Schirmeck.

Alain Ferry, honorary Deputy, has presided over the Memorial since its inception.

The European Union, the State, the Region of Lorraine and the Moselle département all contributed to the initial investment in the Memorial.



In 2015, under Joseph Daul, Hans-Gert Pottering and Martin Schulz's leadership, the European Parliament proposed expanding the Alsace-Moselle Memorial to include the story of Europe in the years since 1945. Thanks to financing by the Grand Est Region, presided over by Philippe Richert, as well as by the European Parliament and the French State, a 400 square-metre space is now dedicated to Europe.

The Alsace-Moselle Memorial, currently closed for renovation and expansion, will reopen its doors to the public on 1 October 2017.



# *Place of the past, of memory, meaning and education ...The Alsace-Moselle Memorial plunges us right into the heart of History!*

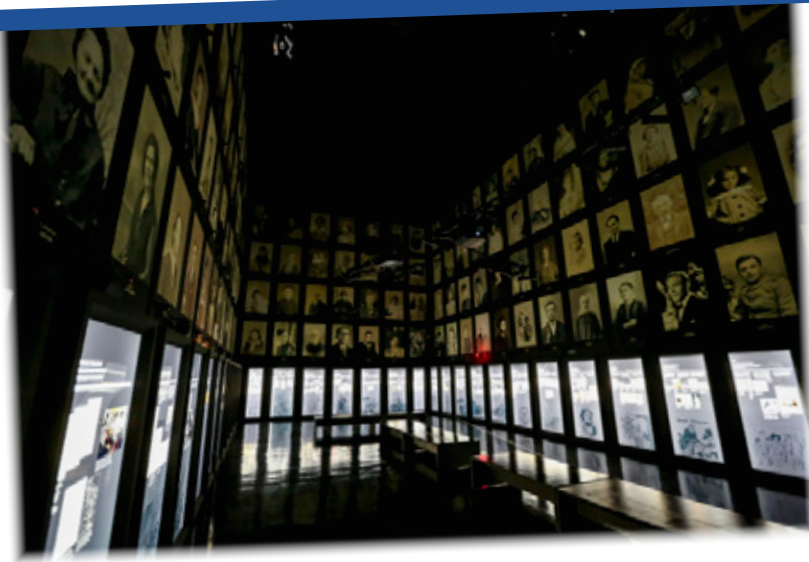
## **Schirmeck.**

Overlooking the green oasis of the valley, a vast building with a glass façade proudly reaches towards the sky. In its heart, the meanderings of history as well as all the sufferings and self-sacrifices of thousands of men, women and children are told, explained, illustrated and brought out into the light.

Through exceptional architecture and scenery, the Alsace-Moselle Memorial not only conveys the often-unknown and misunderstood history of a region tossed from one country to another at the fluctuating border's discretion, but it also offers a reflection on tolerance and nationality and cultural changes, as well as a sense of European identity.

Over 3,000 square metres, this cultural material unveils a fuzzy period of history, which, from 1870 to the end of the Second World War, weighed very heavily on the identity of an entire region and was followed by the birth of a peaceful Europe thanks to the Franco-German reconciliation. The Memorial presents the foundations of European construction. As dark as this past may be, it now serves, and will continue to serve, as a cornerstone for the future. For beyond the simple telling of a unique regional history, the Memorial dares each of us to question our own civic commitment.





Visiting the Alsace-Moselle Memorial is akin to diving into History. It is an immersion experience. The force of the images, sounds and recreated scenes is quite impressive, and we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by emotion.

This place is experienced more than it is simply visited.

### Phase 1: 1870-1939

Leaving the warm curves of the vast entry hall, we descend into the depths of the past. At the foot of the steps is darkness; we enter into a first room the size of a cathedral! Here and there, on walls 12 metres high, we discover with astonishment the 148 portraits of people of every age and status from Alsace and Moselle.

Each portrait is named, and we are surprised to observe the sharpness of a glance, the charm of a hairstyle or the uniqueness of an article of clothing. More than ever, history lessons come to life. Beyond our school textbooks and the anecdotes we have read about rather unknown and immaterial people, there were children, old folks, young women...and here they are, present before us! The French, Germans, Alsatians and the people of Lorraine mix together to tell of the 70 years that were quite chaotic in their own way...

#### A GLANCE BACK AT HISTORY:

*On 19 July 1870, Napoleon III declared war on Prussia.*

*The French armies were beaten in northern Alsace.*

*The Empire was overthrown following the defeat at Sedan. France surrendered arms on 28 January 1871.*

*On 10 May 1871 in Frankfurt, France and Germany signed the Peace Treaty: Alsace and Moselle were ceded to Germany.*

*It was the first annexation, and it was legal since the French National Assembly in Bordeaux voted on it, despite loud protests by deputies from Alsace and Moselle.*

*In June 1871, both Alsace and Moselle départements became Imperial Territory (Reichsland), and would remain so until 1918.*

*Within two years, 128,000 people had left the region. For the men who stayed in their homeland, military service in the German army became obligatory in 1872.*

*Alsace and Moselle would develop within the sphere of their new reality: the Empire of the two Wilhelms and the Bismarckian regime.*

*The years passed. When on 1st August 1914 the Reichsland mobilised its armed forces in view of a declaration of war with France, 380,000 men from Alsace and Moselle were incorporated under the German flag. This world war was waged even within families, as some soldiers fought against their brothers or their cousins who had enlisted in the French army...*

*Combats, massacres...on the Western Front, along the crests of the Vosges Mountains as well as on the Russian Front, soldiers from Alsace-Moselle were required to fight against "enemies," though they were far from being so.*

*Civilians were also viewed as suspicious in everyone's eyes; "Frenchies" for some, "Prussians" for others.*

*Finally, from 16 to 27 November 1918, the French troops entered Alsace to a joyful spirit and mood.*

*The 28 June 1919 Treaty of Versailles placed Alsace and Moselle once again under French rule.*





## Phase 2: September 1939 - June 1940

The halting voice of Hitler. We enter into a recreated village train station. As visitors, we take our place in a train loaded with boxes, suitcases and personal effects. Images projected onto the compartment wall show the evacuation of 610,000 people from Alsace and Moselle to the Southwest of France. On an interactive map, we can match up corresponding evacuated towns with their host towns.

On the other side of the train, a corridor leads to the interior of a Maginot Line fort. White walls on which run electric wires, tracks on the floor, dormitories, armoured doors...the effect is startling! The dissemination of the instructions to the enlisted, with excerpts of speeches and images of combat, give us a sense of the atmosphere during this "phony war."

### A GLANCE BACK AT HISTORY:

*Alsace exploded upon the declaration of war in 1939. A secret evacuation plan was immediately put into action: 611,000 people were evacuated from the border regions—including the greater Strasbourg area. From September 1939 to the summer of 1940, half of the population was affected.*

### A GLANCE BACK AT HISTORY:

Beginning in 1940, the Germans already occupied Strasbourg when they annexed Alsace and Moselle. A customs border was set up on the former 1871/1919 borders. With complete disregard for the Armistice convention, Alsace was attached to the Bade region, while Moselle was linked to the Sarre-Palatinate. Both regions became part of Nazi Germany and totally escaped Vichy. It was Germanisation; administrative and economic integration, Nazification with the preponderance of the party's organisation.

### PETIT RAPPEL HISTO :

Dès 1940, les Allemands, qui occupent Strasbourg, annexent l'Alsace et la Moselle. Un cordon douanier est mis en place sur l'ancienne frontière de 1871/1919. Au mépris de la convention d'Armistice, l'Alsace est rattachée au Pays de Bade, tandis que la Moselle est liée à la Sarre-Palatinat. Les deux régions entrent dans l'Allemagne nazie et échappent totalement à Vichy. C'est la germanisation, l'intégration administrative et économique, la nazification avec la prépondérance de l'organisation du Parti.





#### 4 and 5 Phases: Submission and Forced Integration (August 1942)

We arrive in front of building with characteristic German architecture. Imposing, lightly inclined forwards, this building that we cannot avoid pushes us into an oppressive environment, part administrative and part prison-like.

Here and there, offices illustrate the phases of the discipline of the populations and the forced integration with, in perspective, the Struthof camp, the ultimate terror.

#### A GLANCE BACK AT HISTORY:

Racial legislation was introduced and any trace of French had to disappear. Between July and December 1940, the "Interior French," immigrants, citizens of all belligerent states, gypsies, people of colour, intellectuals and French administrators, were exiled beyond the new borders, as they were considered as undesirables. All Jews were deported and many synagogues were ransacked, used as brothels or pigsties. The Nazi Party set up and the organisations covered the social, cultural and political space.

An internment camp was opened beginning in August 1940 at Schirmeck-La Broque and one year later in the mountains overlooking Schirmeck, the Nazi regime set up a concentration camp at Struthof, where resistance members from all over Europe were interned. Beginning in August 1942, conscription became obligatory for the men of Alsace and Moselle, and they were forcibly integrated into the Wehrmacht, the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe. They were called the "Malgré Nous." Dodgers risked the Schirmeck camp, execution or the deportation of their entire family to refugee camps.





## Phase 6: Coalescence, Resistance and Repression

The exhibition brings the visitor towards the world of the concentration camps. Barbed wire, barracks, pallid lights, watchtowers; through photos, documents and audio-visual resources, this grey world also describes the resistance and the routes towards France.

## Phases 7 and 8: The Resistance Beyond Alsace and Total Warfare

We cross this immense room over a passageway, three and a half metres from the floor. The pines of the forest remind us that the border runs clandestinely along the neighbouring heights...Under our feet and around us, there is no doubt: war surrounds us. The ground, rendered chaotic by bombing attacks, is strewn with debris of all kinds: bicycles, damaged or burned cars, gas cans...The bombers evoke the German retreat and the landing in Normandy. Fortunately, Liberation is close at hand.



### A GLANCE BACK AT HISTORY:

Although Paris was liberated in August 1944, the Alsace-Moselle region would have to wait through four months of fighting until the liberation of Strasbourg and Colmar in February 1945. Out of the 130,000 to 140,000 young soldiers from Alsace and Moselle who were forced to enlist, 30,000 never returned. Most of them lost their lives on the Eastern Front or in the Soviet camps, including Tambov.



### Phase 9: The White Waiting Room, a Passageway

The armistice has been signed. The aims are assessment and reconstruction. The visitor crosses a silent, white holding space like a zone where there is no time.

As soon as we enter into the Eu-Phoria space, we are struck right away by the life that lights up the place. There are colours as well as images. We have now become full actors in this moving space.



### A GLANCE BACK AT HISTORY:

Europe was in ruins by the end of the Second World War. With her industries running in slow motion, her influence on the international stage was diminished. Distrust set in amongst the great world powers. The bloody, violent conflict of 1939-45 soon made way for a new type of warfare, the "Cold War." As early as 1946, Winston Churchill spoke of an "iron curtain" dividing Europe into two rival zones and creating two Germanys. In 1961, the building of the Berlin Wall made this a physical reality.

Western Europe focused on rebuilding peace on the continent while beyond, it was confronted with decolonization procedures. Two views regarding the terms of unification clashed and diverged. The federalists were advocating a European government and the bringing together of national sovereignties. The other group preferred a straightforward coalition between States.

Inspired by the British, this mode of intergovernmental operation was established in 1949, with the creation in London of the first international parliamentary assembly in history: the Council of Europe. The European Court of Human Rights was also founded. Their permanent seat was set in Strasbourg, the city that symbolized reconciliation between France and Germany.

The federal project began to take shape with Robert Schuman's declaration on 9 May 1950 that called for placing the coal and steel markets under a "joint high authority," the European Coal and Steel Community.

The signing of the Treaties of Rome would follow in 1957, setting up the European Economic Community between six countries. A Parliamentary Assembly was established in Strasbourg, as well as the European Atomic Energy Community.





The visitor discovers **the Globe**, an enormous space with a dynamic map addressing ideas such as mankind in Europe, the economy, geopolitics, and citizens....

Across from this, our footsteps lead towards **Europe's Journey**, focused on 3 periods with several stations, including...



## 1945-1961: Peace to Win



Peace was the priority as was, of course, the necessary mourning evoked by the Trial of Bordeaux and the resumption of written articles of the period. Here we see the reproduction of an international press journal, which allows us to measure the great gap of misunderstanding between these regions cut to their core. It also allows space for the German and British points of view. We realise how truly difficult it was to turn that proverbial page of history.

The dynamics of construction have been launched and we linger at the giant format of a Kinect newspaper that we may peruse by a simple movement of the hand in order to discover the origins of European construction.

The last station of this period of history is dedicated to the speed of the 6:



## 6 Founding Countries.

Through a very rhythmic montage based around the stars of the European flag (adopted in 1955), this station shows the proliferation of initiatives and the acceleration that denoted the European construction, Euratom and the Treaty of Rome, for example.

#### A GLANCE BACK AT HISTORY:

From the beginning of the 1960s until the end of the 80s, Europe spread out. Within about a decade, the customs borders were done away with and a common agricultural policy was established. The European Parliament in Strasbourg acquired a new democratic legitimacy thanks to its first election by universal suffrage in June 1979.

## 1961 -1989 : A Model to Create

In order to begin this new stage, the visitor stops in front of two screens that are side by side: two screens, archived images of two views, East and West which evolved in parallel on either side of the iron curtain.

The freedom of exchange, including travel, is also addressed in these videos.

#### A GLANCE BACK AT HISTORY:

In 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany promoted the building of a solid European framework. The Treaty of Maastricht (7 February 1992) promised the safeguard of the European social model confronted with globalization. Europe readied herself to move towards a single currency. The euro, in bills and coins, replaced national currencies beginning on 1 January 2002. The States that participate in the euro zone commit to respecting the stability and growth pact.



## 1989-20... : a future to invent

While at this station, we as visitors are immersed in the tumultuous events of the period from 1989 to 1997, including, of course, the fall of the Berlin Wall. We now see the contrast appear between these scenes of jubilation in November 1989 and the disillusion surrounding the disintegration of the East: Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the break up of former Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia.

Then the path leads us up to the station placed under the patronage of Erasmus. The space presents a series of excerpts from audio-visual archives that respond to each

other, clarifying the challenges of European citizenship in a fun and dynamic way that appeals to younger generations.

Then in an automatic teller machine, we are able to watch speeches from leaders outside of Europe who challenge Europe regarding its future: Former President Obama, the Pope, a representative of a country waiting to join of the Union.

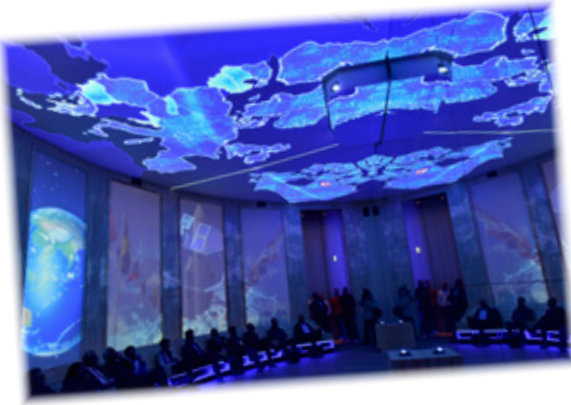




*Several steps further, we enter the Forum.*

## ***The Forum: A 360-degree show!***

***1st video mapping exhibit where the visitor creates his or her own vision of Europe***



The Forum is an extraordinary machine that takes a trip through European time and space. Through images on the floor, the ceiling and on the circular walls, the visitor is plunged into the heart of the history of the European flag.

This symbol that groups all individuals under the collective image that binds them together is decoded here. Made up of 12 stars on a blue background, the European flag questions visitors and offers them the opportunity to hang the stars that in their view make up the Europe of tomorrow.

The visitor becomes an active participant thanks to his or her audio guided tablet. Asked about what Europe will become, he or she votes, makes choices and organises priorities in order to understand the interaction processes. Then several faces of convinced Europeans line up: Adenauer, Louise Weiss, Robert Schuman, Churchill, Spinelli and others. The number 12 is showcased: the twelve signs of the Zodiac and the twelve months of the year light up in twelve European languages.



At the end, feeling completely transported, we visitors witness the 12 stars of the flag coming back together. Like a billowing flag, the ceiling undulates...







Those visitors who have chosen to have their photo taken on the audio guide appear next to a group of Europe's founders, both citizens and fathers of Europe combined, all united in their diversity. The visitor has just discovered the 1st French video mapping designed for a permanent exhibition. It is impressive!

Little by little the images fade away, leaving behind a challenge:

What limits do we give Europe? How can a European citizen be at the origin of a European law? What pathway must be drawn out in order to create, approve and then apply a European law? The visitor understands the importance of the choice of his or her European deputy. The video mapping takes many elements into consideration: from the perfect touristic Europe to the concepts of borders, immigration and travel, as well as environmental issues. We evoke the migration of populations between wars and today... We as visitors then lean into European priorities, its worries, namely, which Europe we want: protective, welcoming, supportive, democratic or more dynamic. Depending on visitors' votes, a system of algorithms calculates the European spirit representative of the group present. Here, at the Alsace-Moselle Memorial, the visitor becomes European.

The visit ends with one last, 7-minute long film showing the perspectives of Europe's evolution. The Alsace-Moselle Memorial wishes for their visiting audience to become aware that in their diversity they belong to one European whole, even if Europe seems in crisis and is decreasing in popularity. Indeed, the Union is not perfect. The European project, with its goals for future economic, social and environmental progress, cultural development and exchanges, needs support from Europeans now more than ever. Visiting the Alsace-Moselle Memorial gives life to ideas that are perhaps abstract for each one of us.

United in diversity, we come out on top.





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