



ICD Case studies

A political European cultural diplomacy

This paper argues that a relaunch of the European CD by the European institutions would help to meet the various global challenges the European Union has to face

A common European cultural diplomacy: a matter of politics¹

Seen from abroad the culture remains a key element of European identity. It should have been taken into account in all E.E.C. policies since the beginning of the construction of Europe in 1957². This *transversal* dimension of culture has however been neglected by the European institutions and let to the member states which in turn forgot it during fifty years. Since the end of the Cold War and the rise of globalization it has been made impossible to continue with the traditional state-centered model because of the small size of European states compared to the others (U.S., China, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, Turkey...). In a global age there is clearly a new need for a common European **cultural diplomacy, that is to say a common political world strategy to export European know-how and to defend Europe's economic interests in the world**. The institutions are an interface between European citizens and the world, to face the trend to build and to trade between large regional areas. The European institutions and some small members states have realized it and have taken lately a series of initiatives since 2007 to promote a real European cultural diplomacy based on a "set of distinctive spiritual and material traits" that characterize the European society³. Will the current preparatory action be sufficient to face a global challenge⁴?

I A cultural diplomacy to reboot European principles.

The potential of cultural diplomacy has not yet been fully appreciated. A common cultural diplomacy means a policy that strengthens a European diplomacy relying on European culture. Having no real proactive policy so far the Europeans had to react. Since the end of the Second

¹ Opening remarks at the International symposium on cultural diplomacy in the EU, Brussels, 22-24th May 2014.

² Treaty of Rome, art. 128, §4.

³ Communication on a European agenda for culture, COM(2007) 242 final, May 2007 ; M. Schaake, Report on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external cultural actions, European Parliament, 2010/2161 (INI), 31st March 2011.

⁴ Conference Culture in EU external relations, 7th-8th April 2014.

World War there were some reactions to americanization but it was largely accepted; now Europe has to face new emerging cultures, which was initially welcomed as a huge opportunity to learn from others but is also perceived as a threat. We had to wait till recently to have a more critical reflection on culture at a global scale. The 2007 Agenda for culture relaunched the initiative and the last workplan made it one of its six priorities. But European diplomacy still lacks visibility. To move on it may be useful to recall the three principles mentioned in the treaties: definition of its own **identity**, peacekeeping, and international cooperation

A. First, European cultural diplomacy would have a unifying effect on the European Union.

There are still huge discrepancies at home gives the impression that regional culture divides in Europe notably in Flanders, Catalonia...where only local identity is promoted. At the moment some member states are more equal than others. Moreover, there is a clear historical and financial gap between Western and Eastern Europe that should be bridged. Another one separates the North from the South. **The lowest common cultural denominator is...American English, curriculum, food, browser, phone or movies.** Now, the European Union operates for development through structural funds and culture is part of it. The role of a cultural policy would be to start with a reduction of these disparities at a local/regional level. The leading nations should be invited to share their expertise and less well known cultures should be promoted.

Second, cultural diplomacy helps to promote diversity and to cope with a global peace challenge abroad. Some values are referred to in the Preamble of the Treaty of Lisbon. They could be implemented as principles for action. Cultural policy reactivates this set of basic principles: cultural diversity⁵; human rights; multilateralism and diversity. They are the best way to avoid the charge of neocolonialism. But the main risk nowadays is not a superiority complex, Europe looks rather shy on the current international affairs. Many people laughed at the pianist on Maidan who tried to build a bridge between the pro-Russian government and the protesters. These

⁵ in cooperation with the UNESCO

initiatives are more and more frequent – lately in Turkey by Davide Martello and tend to build a kind of pianistic youtube global culture crossing the borders.

B. The social effect of cultural diplomacy at home.

Moreover, this cultural policy is a tool to strengthen social cohesion. The main cultural productions in large European cities are mainly seen by an educated elite whereas migrants are often limited to popular culture on TV. This leads to reject migrants as part of a foreign culture. Many efforts were already made in that sense but they are clearly useless as they refer to them as members of a community. It is a pity to consider minorities of recent migrants as only an obstacle to implement cultural policies. A European cultural diplomacy should not only be the result of the work made by a political or cultural elite leading the foreign diplomacy of the European Union. These actors should intervene and be part of an **inclusive society** as **ambassadors of a mixed culture**. They don't always want or feel themselves as cultural ambassadors of a specific culture or of a neighborhood, but could be on the opposite good ambassadors of Europe abroad. An **affirmative action** could be conducted in the field too.

C Cultural diplomacy as the most relevant strategy to face geopolitical competition.

Cultural diplomacy is often seen from below as a combination of national policies. It should be seen from above as one of the world policies. **The current approach is far too abstract and suffers from a lack of *Realpolitik*.** The European Union makes as if all cultures were equal. It completely ignores the reality. As a consequence of the Cold War **the weight of the American culture especially in the music and audiovisual field or the rise of Asia neither (China, South Korea⁶) cannot be ignored** any longer. It is time to give up a naive approach whereas in the European Union some countries already have a policy of permanent branding for themselves (See the UK and the 2012 Olympics). The shortcomings of such policies are obvious. The new Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnerships cannot consider all cultures on an equal footing. It is impossible to stay passive and let the European Union be only influenced by others as

⁶ The recent South Korean case is interesting as it doesn't really need any hard power to be partly influential worldwide. See H.E. Chang-Beom Kim's presentation, "Korea's perspective and practices in Cultural Diplomacy", International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy, Brussels, 23rd May 2014.

in a backlash of history. On the other hand, many artists have opposed a vision of culture seen only as a global *product* where competition only benefits the biggest actors⁷. Cultural products are different and imply specific strategies. An active policy should avoid a fierce competition of cultures, values and superiority with the tragic outcomes observed before in history.

II The policy of a European cultural diplomacy is a global investment.

A. The need to strengthen the content of a cultural diplomacy.

At the moment, culture is divided and there is hardly a common understanding on some preferences of a consumer *welfare, sustainable development, consumer protection*⁸. **Beyond the political choices, there should be a minimal common agreement.** As mentioned by Pr. Grygiel, “Europe’s underlying sense of a *raison d’être* can be restored only by a slow regeneration of its foundations based on history, religion and culture”⁹. **We could add common history and common legacy, the role of literature, common exchanges and common creations.** This reminder was not needed so far as soon as the European culture was leading the world. Now, with a declining population and influence, the common features of this civilization are underlined when compared to the others.

1°) Europe needs to look at *history* as a wealth not as a shame. As shown by recent scientific works, slavery for instance is not a European thing but in many respects an African, American and even also Asian trade since the Ancient times and the Middle Ages. The share of responsibility of Europe in the world wars is immense, but many other stakeholders worldwide are not especially brilliant. How is it possible that the European Commission let the commemorations of World War One to national/regional celebrations? The issue is not an opportunity to reaffirm a nationalist past without questioning its identity but to have a message to deliver that is not restricted to some selective aspects of history. The crimes of communism don’t refrain the Chinese or Russian diplomats from

⁷ Pétition « Sauvez la culture », décembre 2013, denounces the Green Paper on the potential of creative and cultural industries, COM (2010) 183. See also Intervention of T. Ostermeier, forum de Chaillot, Paris, 4th April 2014 against americanization of European copyrights.

⁸ Z. Laïdi, *EU Foreign Policy in a Globalized World: Normative Power and Social Preferences*, Oxford, Routledge, 2008.

⁹ J. Grygiel, “Europe : Strategic Drifter”, *The National Interest*, July/August 2013, p.38 cité par C. Carta, International symposium on cultural diplomacy in the EU, 24th May 2014.

using a form of cultural diplomacy. Opposed to this political and emotional approach a much more complex scientific and historical approach has to be put forward. In Ukraine for instance attention should be paid to the role of history for the resolution of conflicts. Many rebels or pro-Europeans are denounced as “Nazis” referring to 1941 whereas the memories of what happened in Russia under the Soviet regime in 1932-1933 have gone. Museums like the new House of European History, local museums, and cultural centers have a role to play in this complex narrative. These institutions are political because they are the fruit of a project but they shouldn't be the reflect of a particular political party.



2°) Similarly the content of the European cultural diplomacy seems to avoid *religion*. Whereas the other continents assume their religious identity (Christianity in the US, islam elsewhere, Shintoism in Japan...), Europe is the only one to go beyond the issue of religion and to hide its Christian roots. This seems perfectly justified by a necessity to be neutral and to take into account its cultural diversity compared to the United states but this attitude goes often to the limit where Christianity is rejected as a fault as a guilt. This leads to forget the historical roots and dimensions of Christianity and its message nowadays as a legacy.

B.The first benefits of a soft coordination.

Cultural diplomacy is supposed to make the best of budget cuts at the moment. Some conservative politicians suggest the states should just coordinate, sign and pay. They have to be discreet not to interfere with the cultural sector and to stay neutral. According to a senior Commission official, the mission of the European cultural diplomacy would only be to supplement,

¹⁰ *Building a house of European history*, European Parliament, 2013.

not to overshadow the national initiatives¹¹. The focus is very much on the opportunities for the private sector. The total amount of the 27 member states which are members of the European Union National Institutes for Culture (E.U.N.I.C.) is above 2,5 billion €. Most of these actions remain isolated however¹². Many of them should be put in common to reach a critical mass. There is a need to coordinate existing national cultural action. **Cultural diplomacy helps to save costs.** These are costless options that could even save money. Moreover, other policies are directly addressed by this action: it offers new perspectives to European private cultural actor even at the local scale and creates jobs (8 million)¹³; it strengthens peace through exchanges; it betters education (Why not an Erasmus 0 in highschoools?) and strengthens research. What could be then the new tools of this enhanced coordination? The European Commission web site could offer an exhaustive mapping of the cultural initiatives and matching funds on to avoid repetition¹⁴. The EU centres abroad could be more active and not only based on public diplomacy¹⁵. Some projects led by national cultural institutions could be even more europeanized. A label for the cultural heritage has already been defined, but a new label for European labels abroad would better identify a selection of European cultural production. This is less useful for major member states but more important for small countries and small productions that lack visibility. Cultural diplomacy would be just a rational way to make policies more efficient.

C.The negative consequences of austerity in cultural diplomacy.

Culture shouldn't be seen as a sumptuary expense but as an investment whereas the low cost European cultural diplomacy is an illusion that entails some risks. The cultural policy in Europa has failed since a long time due to many facts: the Cold War, conservative majorities which don't consider it as a priority, the weights of nationalism nowadays. The 2008 crisis has only strengthened the idea that culture is not worth money. Culture is

¹¹ Quoted by A. Everitt, *Europe: United or divided by culture?*, Chatham House, 2007, 80p., p.33.

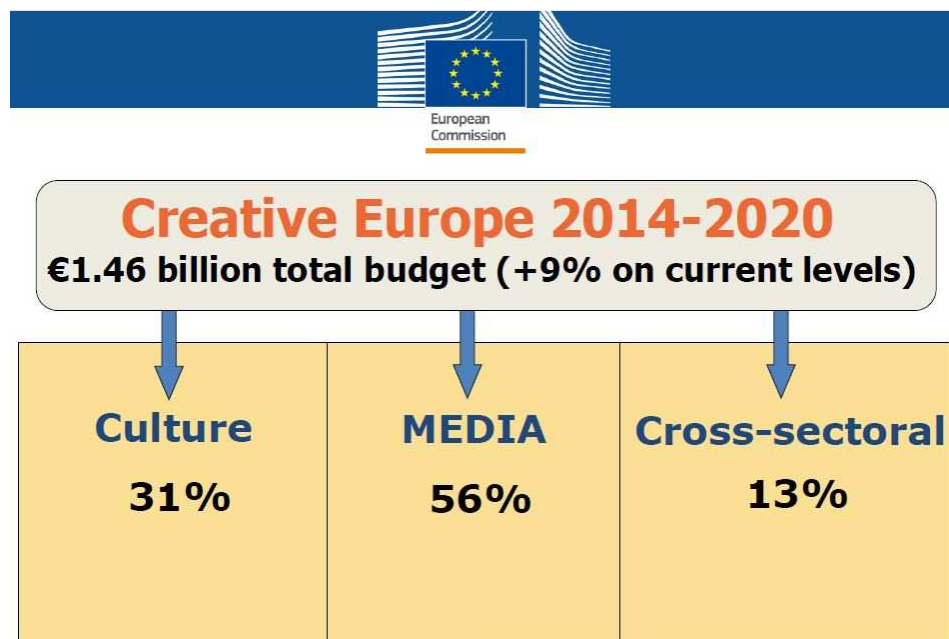
¹² R. Fisher, mentioned the shortcomings of ad hoc events, at the More Europe seminar: Culture & European Identity Paris, 23rd May 2012

¹³ W. Streitenberger, "The EU Regional policy-Economic Policy and cultural diplomacy in save time", 23rd May 2014, International symposium on cultural diplomacy in the EU, Brussels, 22-24th May 2014.

¹⁴ As suggested by the report on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external cultural relations, 31rd March 2011, n°21.

¹⁵ Final report, Evaluation of Eu centres, February 2011, EEAS.

everywhere but artists complain they are less supported by their national government and by the European institutions in a time of crisis. More than ever there are other priorities: employment, defense... Not everyone is convinced by the weight of culture. Many people question the necessity of a ministry for culture in some states and *a fortiori* of a European cultural diplomacy. It is impossible to work without a decent budget. Many officials pretended they had manage to save some money for culture.



In fact, even if some critics are exaggerated, the budget of the European Union has decreased proportionally. The former Culture 2007 and Media programmes represented 0,15% of the European budget, that is to say that every citizen was supposed to pay a modest 45 cents a year. The current framework includes 1.46 billion € budget for Creative Europe¹⁶ between 2014 and 2020, that is *at least* 0,15%¹⁷ of the European budget but only **41cents/citizen/year**¹⁸. This means that if we take into account the successive enlargements (Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia) and the consecutive rise of the European population **the financial effort for culture has slightly**

¹⁶ cf. B. Gessler, International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy in the EU, Brussels, 23rd May 2014

¹⁷ and not 0,05% as mentioned wrongly by many sources (cf Helly or the petition mentioned above).

¹⁸ 209 million for 2014 far less for instance than the 730 million in France alone (The programme of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs « Diplomatie culturelle et d'influence » amounts 725 million in 2014 and 6 additional million are dedicated to the external cultural action by the French Ministry of Culture).

diminished. This policy comes along with restrictions that would be to fund less productions (250.000 artists and cultural professionals, 2.000 cinemas, 800 films and 4.500 book translations) but better ones by a selective choice of works selected by mixed juries through real true Europeanwide competitions. Because of globalization there is a risk that history just becomes a luxury and that people tend to forget what made Europe since the Ancient times. Under the word “culture” a series of artificial new or fictive reconstructions pop up to attract the attention of tourists. At a time when history makes its comeback the threat of *kitsch* and artificial resurgence in Europe has never been so high.

III The dream of a cultural diplomacy which would empower the new actors of the European cultural diplomacy

A. Cultural diplomacy is a matter of attitude and of education.

Diplomacy means first an attitude, a soft and flexible way to deal with differences. In the last More Europe conference many speakers insisted on the principle of humility and a capacity listening¹⁹. It is true that some national diplomats tend simply to ignore other’s voices. For many European officials culture remains a statement, a stand, a DG among others. It is remarkable that since Jean Monnet no European top official has a cultural background as such, whereas law and economics dominate curriculums of civil servants. The questions on culture and history have been removed from EPSO test in 2010. History tends to be an obstacle, a weight. This is also true at a national level. No wonder if a majority of MEPs considers that history is meaningless and Strasbourg with its double historical legitimacy a too costly option. Many diplomats as well educated in a very political and national environment don’t see the immediate purpose of culture. It is not sure that training as recommended by the European Parliament would be enough to change these habits²⁰. **Hence the necessity to resort to practitioners with a proper dedicated education** cultural professionals or cultural managers to second the work of civil servants. We don’t need to educate some new regional cultural ambassadors like Rubens or Milos but real *European* citizens able to take advantage of different cultures. They could be the *cultural attachés* of tomorrow.

¹⁹ P. Vimont’s speech, Conference Culture in EU external relations, 7th April 2014.

²⁰ Report Schaake recommends only an appropriate training.

B.The central role of the new European diplomatic service.

At the moment the European diplomacy as such is very young since 1992 and could hardly face any major crisis since (Bosnian War, terrorist threats, Arab-Israeli conflict). The Treaty of Lisbon made it a common policy but didn't modify the general content of this policy. Member states tend to have their own foreign and cultural diplomacy which is sometimes more effective but also more violent (Libya 2011, Mali 2013). Will the new established European External Action Service (E.E.A.S.) be the tool for a renovation? Since 4 years, the young E.E.A.S. lacks visibility and confidence as member states tend to keep for themselves the main political decisions abroad. Its budget is limited. Cultural diplomacy offers a huge opportunity to strengthen this power. As recommended by the ICD²¹, the E.E.A.S. appointed a **contact point** on cultural issues in February 2014. It should really lead the foreign diplomacy and adding some issues on the agenda of the Council with a strong sense of leadership and coordinate the various units involved in European cultural affairs. The head of the service at the E.E.A.S. should set an example. It is important to appoint a worldwide renowned European specialist at the E.E.A.S. Cultural ambassadors would get along the High Representative in the main strategic missions²². Conversely, some units of the DG EAC should work in close cooperation with the E.E.A.S.

C.The new social forums of cultural diplomacy between citizens, artist and European officials.

1°) There is also a need for social relations between these culture specialists and all the others through annual meetings and conferences. The European Council suggested several meetings that took place since 2011. It seems vital to institutionalize meetings between the new Commissioner, who should also be a practitioner, willing to regulate and invest in culture, the DG EAC, the others DGs and the E.E.A.S. and the Council. Culture must be a habit not an exception.

2°) Culture has not to be funded by the government only. This is not only a public issue but a partnership with the private sector has become increasingly important. The Commission improves

²¹ Recommendation n°5, F. Serodes, "A Common European cultural policy in the European Union", ICD Case studies, 2012

²² D. Helly, More cultural Europe in the world, 2012, p.29

the mobility of artists²³ but it is also essential to find common places. As there are already so many venues for culture, it is difficult to find a unique place for these initiatives but maybe the European *capital of culture* could be the place for this investment and an attempt to create a digital alley, hub or cluster to boost creativity. Every three year a forum in Brussels makes a review. Finally, artists should be invited to travel more and get along with some professionals to take part to international conferences and exhibitions. In the long run, a digital social platform allows citizens, artists and institutions to keep in touch²⁴.

3°) Besides, cultural diplomacy offers also a unique opportunity to implement European citizenship and to go beyond the Parliamentary elections once every five years. The possibility of social citizenship through *crowdfunding* of global cultural projects should be more advertised and promoted through forums for *crowdfunding* of projects with a global dimension and taking place in the European capital for culture every year.

Conclusion

After the disaster of European elections in 2014 it is not sure that the European parties are well aware of the impact of this dimension and use it as an argument for Europe of culture and cultural diplomacy. But are there really other options to avoid loss of influence, creativity and jobs.

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²³ It is a key element of Creative Europe.

²⁴ The website of the EACEA https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe_en should be more citizen friendly.