

THE EMERGENCE OF AN EUROPEAN UNION CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

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ABSTRACT. On 16 April 2020, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released preliminary figures² according to which the collective Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the European Union (EU) and its Member States to developing countries amounted to 75.2 billion in 2019, representing 55.2% of global assistance. The EU and its Member States therefore maintain their position as the largest international aid donor.

In spite of the vast amount of resources spent annually by the EU, there is widespread perception that the EU punches below its weight. Notwithstanding the undeniable positive impact that the EU external policies have on the ground, the EU's role in international development remains mostly invisible.

This paper presents the perception of the EU and EU's policies abroad and makes the case for the necessity of an integrated and fully coordinated EU Public Diplomacy (PD) capable of communicating effectively and strengthening EU's role as a global actor. It argues that culture has a substantial potential in Europe's international relations, making the case for the necessity of an integrated and tailor-made EU Cultural Diplomacy. This paper shows that culture is a worthwhile investment in driving economic growth. Failure to capitalise on this would be a huge missed opportunity for Europe.

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² *Publication of preliminary figures on 2019 Official Development Assistance, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/api/files/attachment/864363/Annex_Tables_and_Graphs_ODA_2019.pdf*

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Introduction

The lack of visibility of the economic contribution of the EU to developing countries shows not only that the citizens of those countries are to a great extent unaware of the important support provided but also that there is an EU lack of capacity and ability to communicate its achievement. Traditional communication techniques on which diplomacy has relied so far are no longer efficient in achieving the expected impact. The EU needs to engage in a type of cultural diplomacy that, while fostering the respect of common values, would build on the key elements of its attractiveness: style of life, modernity, multiculturalism, etc. as shown in the study on the perception of the EU and of its policies presented in this paper.

There are direct and indirect ways in which culture can have an impact on both external relations and economic growth. This paper attempts to map the various initiatives at EU level in the area of culture and to indicate the need for a more pragmatic approach to culture and cultural relations. While it makes the argument for a tailor-made approach in EU Cultural Diplomacy, based on the specificities of each country and on the proven potential of the European culture, it also sheds light on the lack of a consistent approach to culture and cultural relations as drivers for economic growth.

The article presents EU competences as defined by the EU treaties and regulations and maps different initiatives of the EU in the field of culture, with particular focus on culture in the frame of EU external relations. It draws a broad overview of various EU initiatives, from the *UNESCO 2005 Convention* to the *2016 EU Strategy for international cultural relations*, while touching upon different aspects of cultural relations processes and practices. In this respect, a number of publications on cultural diplomacy and on soft power in the digital age have been used, as detailed in the References section.

Furthermore, the paper argues that culture, in particular cultural industries, can play a catalysing role in driving Europe's global competitiveness. Although cultural and creative sectors make a special and multi-faceted contribution towards strengthening Europe's competitiveness, the European vision for smart economic growth lacks pragmatism without a strong link to the innovation and creativity generated by its creative and cultural industries.

Given the considerable number of factors that culture entails – from an economic and social to political and security aspects, with subtle and various diplomatic implications – attempts to grasp its complexity can be somehow unsatisfactory and subject to critical views. The ultimate objective of this paper is to place cultural aspects under the spotlight and initiate a conversation on the need to reframe EU's approach to cultural diplomacy.

Treaty provisions on culture

Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states that the EU has the competence to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States in the area of culture. Further to this Paragraph 3 of Article 167 of the TFEU states that the EU and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and relevant international organisations in the sphere of culture. Paragraph 4 of the same Article 167, continues with the provision that the Union shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of the Treaties, in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures. At the level of the institutional framework, the European Parliament and the Council are to adopt incentive measures while the Council shall adopt recommendations on a proposal from the Commission.

A brief history – the emergence of an EU cultural diplomacy

In 2006, the EU became one of the 144 Parties ratifying the UNESCO *2005 Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions*. The Convention's Preamble underlines the need to incorporate culture as a strategic element in national and **international**

development policies, as well as in international development cooperation. The convention provides a framework for policies on sustainable development and has since become a **cornerstone** of the EU's development cooperation policy.

In 2007, the Commission proposes a new *European agenda for culture in a globalising world*³ in an attempt to respond to the challenges of globalisation and identifies **culture in external relations** as a fundamental pillar. The new strategy proposes intensifying cultural cooperation in the EU and acknowledges the key role of culture in social, economic and political developments as well as its fundamental role in the process of European integration. For the first time the potential of culture in international relations is clearly articulated. The new European agenda for culture identifies three fundamental pillars, one of them being – **“Culture as a vital element in international relations”**. The cultural dimension becomes a clearly defined ingredient of EU external relations, as previously recommended by the 2005 UNESCO Convention.

Since the Commission's proposal of the 'European Agenda for Culture in a globalising world' (2007), we have been witnessing the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (1 December 2009) and the establishment in 2011 of the EU's diplomatic service – the European External Action Service (EEAS). This evolution created a new architecture and, at the same time, the prerequisite for the development of an EU Public diplomacy with culture at the core of its actions for strengthening EU's position as a global player.

The idea of building on the dimension of culture in external relations gains traction. The *Council Conclusions on the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in external relations* (2008)⁴, the *European Parliament's Resolution on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external action* (2011)⁵ and the *Preparatory Action paper 'Culture in EU external relations'*

³ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world, 10 May 2007

⁴ Council Conclusions on the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in the external relations of the Union and its Member States 2905th Education, Youth And Culture Council meeting Brussels, 20 November 2008

⁵ Cultural dimensions of EU external actions European Parliament resolution of 12 May 2011 on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions (2010/2161(INI))

(2014)⁶, all stress the role of culture in the policies and programmes conducted within the framework of external relations.

Beyond declarations, the **Commission's Preparatory Action 'Culture in EU External Relations'** (2014) was the result of a study covering 54 countries – the EU Member States (28), the 16 countries under the European Neighbourhood Policy⁷ and the 10 Strategic Partnership (SP) countries.⁸ Culture as a **substantial potential** in Europe's international relations was the main outcome of the report. However, the report also stated: "failure to **capitalise on the potential of culture would be a huge missed opportunity for Europe**".

The report fully confirmed the necessity of the process initiated in 2007 by the European Commission's "Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world". At the same time, the study analysed how third country stakeholders collaborated with these European cultural actors and how they view their relationships with Europe, confirming that many people across the world have **a strong interest in engaging culturally** with Europe. The European 'narrative' and in particular Europe's cultural diversity, its fundamental values, such as freedom of expression, and Europe's cultural and **creative industries** figured as main points of attraction.

However, the study also reveals that growing pressure in the international landscape Europe has been successful in projecting an image of cultural creativity and diversity. However, it is now facing a fragmented world, with multiple and at the same time newly emerging identities on a backdrop of permanent cultural and social transformation, shaped largely by the digital revolution, the expansion of social media and large-scale political changes. The report argues that Europe has to step up, go beyond a position of "projection" and engage with the rest of the world through "mutual learning and sharing" in a spirit of "global cultural

⁶ Preparatory action "Culture in external relations", Engaging the world: towards global cultural citizenship, 2 October 2017

⁷ The ENP countries are the following: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Moldova, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine

⁸ The Strategic Partner countries are: Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and the United States of America

citizenship” where cultural rights and responsibilities are shared, with “participation for all in a framework of cosmopolitan solidarity”. Furthermore, the report identifies in its “recommendation for ways forward” the principles on which cultural relations should be centred: **reciprocity** and mutuality, notably mutual listening and learning. As Sir Martin Davidson, CEO of the British Council noted: “Europeans must be willing to ask the “Other” what (s)he really wants”⁹. Planning and implementation of cultural relations should involve all cultural stakeholders right from the outset, including third country partners, arguing that deep and lasting ties can be achieved through “co-creation” of projects.

The report explores ways in which to reconcile the rich diversity of European cultures serving broader European interests, arguing for **strategic communication** and **coordination** at a transnational dimension and coherence among its tools, instruments and actors responsible for them. Member states have competence in external relations but progress will depend on the achievement of subsidiarity complementary, meaning how European institutions and expert organisations will support this process.

Operational recommendations include the creation of a **strong coordination mechanism** within the **European External Action Service** (EEAS) to coordinate relevant EC DGs, governmental and non-governmental stakeholders as well as civil society and the set-up of a network of cultural relations experts in EU Delegations worldwide. Noteworthy, **better communication** is underlined, with reference to enhanced EU Public Diplomacy. It calls for a coherent international cultural relations strategy, recognising the need for Europe to engage with audiences around the world in new ways, “listening, sharing, imagining and creating together, rather than simply projecting our individual national cultures in a purely representational logic”.

While culture in external relations can foster **trade, investment** and **competitiveness**, the report points out that little benefit can be expected from the deployment of culture in external relations unless procedures concerning applications for EU funding are simplified and made accessible.

⁹ International Conference in Brussels, 8 April, 2014.

Results and recommendations of the study "Analysis of the perception of the EU and of EU's policies abroad", December 2015

Recognising the need for an enhanced EU Public Diplomacy, the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments of the European Commission requested a study on the perception of the EU abroad. "Analysis of the perception of the EU and of EU's policies abroad"¹⁰ was published in December 7, 2015 in an effort to have a better understanding of the perception of the EU and EU's policies primarily in the ten EU strategic partner (SP) countries. It is therefore relevant to communication and public diplomacy activities in third countries and aims to contribute to EU Public Diplomacy outreach activities for meaningful and effective EU engagement globally. The analysis aimed at improving ability to assess the results of future actions in the field of Public Diplomacy as well as to contribute to HRVP's efforts that will lead to the new EU Global Strategy.

The European Union has official Strategic Partnerships (SP)¹¹ with 10 countries - Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, and the US.

The study measured visibility, what kind of actor the EU is perceived to be (actorness), its effectiveness, its local resonance and the EU as a norm-setter. The key themes included economy, trade, politics security, social development and international aid, culture, education, migration and multiculturalism, environment and energy, research, science and technology. The target groups covered youth, business, policy makers, academia and think tanks, civil society and media. The analysis drew on literature review, (social) media analysis, public opinion poll and non-representative elite interviews.

Key findings showed that the EU is less visible in the US, Canada and Japan as compared to other countries such as China, Brazil and in particular Russia. Economy is the most visible theme. Political, social (including migration) and cultural issues follow. It comes as no surprise that the European sovereign debt crisis, the threat of Grexit and of Brexit,

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/sites/fpi/files/eu_perceptions_study_executive_summary.pdf

¹¹ This entails holding regular meetings at the level of heads of state and numerous other trade, politics and cultural activities.

the migration/refugee crisis figures high in media reports. At the same time reports on EU in the field of research, science, technology, environment and education are very few.

It is noteworthy to mention that, despite the EU being the world's biggest donor, the finding of the report show that the EU's role in international development is mostly invisible. Media focus on dramatic events is not surprising, however the fact that EU's longer-term efforts go unnoticed, deserves further reflection.

On the question of actorness – what kind of actor the EU is perceived to be – weather active, important influential or not, the response is overall positive across SP countries, with the exception of Russia. Negative perceptions can be explained by EU's reaction to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the imposed economic sanctions. The EU is influential in global economic affairs, climate change and technological progress with a tendency for a less positive answer in Russia and Japan. In terms of influence and importance, the EU is perceived as falling behind the US, the UN, and respondent's own bigger player countries.

Around 70-80% of responses in all SP countries, including Russia see the EU very attractive in terms of culture and lifestyle. Europe's culture is an influential point of attraction.

The EU is best described by the word “multicultural” ranking first in the US, Canada, China, Mexico and Japan, second in Russia. To note that multicultural can be understood in both a positive and a negative way. The EU is consistently associated with the concept of “modern” and “strong”.

Respondents agreed that the EU is an important trade partner and a good performer on global trade. The economic field where the EU performs best is tourism. In politics and security, media freedom, justice and rule of law were assessed relatively well. However, less positively assessed was the support to developing countries and the dealing with refugees.

In the SP countries' perception, the EU is viewed as performing well in its overall quality of life, in education as well as at the level of equality between men and women. Nonetheless, there is a less positive perception of EU's integration of refugees and protection of minorities, as well as of its work on the eradication of poverty and reduction of income inequalities.

The European monuments and museums, history, arts, luxury goods and clothes are particularly highly regarded while in general the domain of culture has overall positive appreciation. There is a higher appreciation among the SP countries of the historical facets of the EU (monuments, history, all types of art) rather than the modern.

The EU is seldom recognised as a norm-setter in spite of Europe's long academic history and of its currently intense academic discourse. It is however recognised as an international norm-setter in three areas: renewable energy technology, equality between women and men and gay rights. It is worthwhile noting that respondents were hesitant as to the appropriateness and applicability of EU norms in their specific contexts.

The conclusions of the study support the undeniable necessity for a **centralised EU Public Diplomacy strategy** with a **decentralised implementation to adjust to local specificities**. The need for a cultural relations strategy was a prominent recommendation. The importance of adapting to local audiences is stressed with a view to formulating and targeting messages while keeping aware of differing interpretations of history. Elements of European superiority should be removed from communications, particularly in countries that have experienced European colonialism.

The EU should build on and maximise the potential of its network of over 138 Delegations around the world. In this respect, Delegations should be main the interlocutors in identifying messages on areas of interest, key topics and key target groups and better coordination with the Member States should take place through joint strategic approaches and regular institutionalised coordination meetings with respective SP countries.

Engagement in Cultural Diplomacy should centre on the very positive perceptions of European/ EU Member States' culture, arts and history. As underlined in the conclusions of the study¹², engagement with expert networks should be pursued by establishing platforms for interested experts to network, share information and exchange best practices on policy fields that are relevant to EU PD. Furthermore, local experts should be involved into PD policy design while **'listening' exercises** for identifying perceptions should be integrated in the policy design from the outset. Centrally-formulated messages and strategies must be localised. Engagement with local civil society and the youth must result in broad outreach with localised messages.

¹² "Analysis of the perception of the EU and of EU's policies abroad", December 2015

Another recommendation was the use of **e-diplomacy** for efficiency and quick outreach of distant audiences. This would require specialised training to EU officials, whether in EU Delegations or in Head Quarters, in order to improve **digital diplomacy** skills for achieving successful implementation of e-diplomacy actions.

The set-up of sufficient local resources and of decentralised decision-making processes are necessary for having the required flexibility to react to unexpected events. Funds dedicated to PD measures should be combined in a lump sum budget that EU Delegations can use for the implementation of a PD strategy with activities tailored to local conditions. With processes streamlined and competencies decentralised chances are higher that resources will be focused on implementation of PD activities rather than on dealing with bureaucratic and hierarchical bottlenecks.

Finally yet importantly – evaluation should be an integral part of any outreach activity, with evaluation tools and success indicators (such as the ones used in this study) at the core of PD initiatives. EU Delegations should have access to measurement tools for assessing the efficiency and success of their activities.

Culture as driver of economic growth – *The EU Strategy for international cultural relations, 2016*

On 8 June 2016, the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini formally adopts and presents the new “***EU Strategy for international cultural relations***”¹³. It aims at “encouraging cultural cooperation between the EU and its partner countries and promoting a global order based on peace, the rule of law, freedom of expression, mutual understanding and respect for fundamental values”. The 2016 Communication is a cornerstone in the process of policy formulation initiated in 2007. The EU now sees public diplomacy as an existential necessity.

The 2016 strategy states: “As a party to the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, the EU is committed to promoting the diversity of cultural expression as

¹³ Joint Communication to The European Parliament and The Council “Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations”, Join(2016) 29 final

part of its international cultural relations. This reflects and promotes the EU's fundamental values, such as human rights, gender equality, democracy, freedom of expression and the rule of law, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity”.

Culture, in particular inter-cultural dialogue, can contribute to addressing major global challenges – such as conflict prevention and resolution, integrating refugees, countering violent extremism, and protecting cultural heritage.

Cultural exchanges can also bring **economic benefits**. As mentioned upfront in the Joint Communication (JOIN (2016) 29 final) - Global trade in creative products has more than doubled between 2004 and 2013¹⁴, whilst culture is a central element in the new economy driven by creativity, innovation and access to knowledge.

Cultural and creative industries represent around 3 % of the global GDP and 30 million jobs¹⁵. In the EU alone, these industries account for over 7 million jobs.¹⁶ Likewise, in developing countries, the cultural and creative sectors contribute to promoting sustainable development and inclusive growth. Culture can therefore help promote job creation and competitiveness both inside the EU and beyond its borders. This is recognised in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹⁷, which underlines that culture, including world cultural heritage and creative industries, can have an important role in achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Culture is therefore one of the important sectors promoted as part of the EU's development cooperation.

This Joint Communication proposes ***an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations*** that focuses on advancing cultural cooperation with partner countries across three main strands: supporting culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development; promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations; reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage. In pursuing these objectives, the EU's International Cultural Relations will contribute to making the EU a stronger

¹⁴ The Globalisation of Cultural Trade: A Shift in Cultural Consumption--International flows of cultural goods and services 2004-2013, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2016.

¹⁵ Cultural Times, report by CISAC and UNESCO, 2015.

¹⁶ Ibidem

¹⁷ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

global actor – a major priority for this Commission as well as of the High Representative's forthcoming Global Strategy.

The Joint Communication (JOIN (2016) 29 final) places culture as driver of the economic growth first.

While in the European debate creative and cultural industries have been traditionally less prominent elements of economic growth, the example of the UK would be worthwhile noting.

As Martin Rose and Nick Wadham-Smith write, diplomacy is “*not primarily about building trust, but about achieving specific, policy-driven transactional objectives [...] Nations don't have permanent friends, [...] they only have permanent interests.*”

In the UK, the academic policy discourse has focused more upon creative industries and UK's creative economy agenda has been driven by the evidence of the creative industries' contribution to economic growth. Comparable to financial services' contribution to economic growth and even faster growing than other sectors in the UK, creative industries accounted for over 6% of Gross Value Added and for around 8% of the UK economy in 2007 (NESTA 2009). Furthermore, growth in employment has been higher in creative industries than in the rest of the economy (DCMS 2010). According to Deloitte (2008), in 2007, both cultural and tourism industries accounted for more than 8% of the UK's GDP. So combined, creative and cultural economies in the UK contributed close to 15% of national GDP.

These figures are relevant in the EU context, where culture and the role of culture are seen as generating innovation and creativity resulting in economic growth. EU Council's conclusions on the contribution of the cultural and creative sectors to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives have recognised that the cultural sector has been experiencing growth higher than that of the wider economy, with employment growth also higher than the average for the economy (EU Council 2007, p.3).

Cultural and creative industries have gained the well-deserved importance and the EU's has mentioned the “promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy” in its “First ever European strategy for culture: contributing to economic growth and intercultural understanding”. (EU Commission 2007, p1).

At the same time, the Council conclusions (EU Council 2007, p 4.), recognised that “cultural and creative sectors make a special and multi-

faceted contribution towards strengthening Europe's global competitiveness". The Cultural and Creative Industries generate around €509 billion per year, representing 5.3% of the EU's total GDP and employ 12 million full-time jobs, which constitutes 7.5% of the EU's employment and the third largest employer sector in the EU (European Commission, 2018).

Conclusions

According to Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta **Urpilainen**: *"As the world's leading donor of Official Development Assistance, the EU is saving lives, building stronger economies and protecting the planet for the benefit of millions throughout the world."*¹⁸

Cultural diplomacy represents a means for states to exercise and maximise soft power, the power to persuade and influence other states or citizens in order to achieve foreign policy goals. Policy makers use culture for influencing foreign publics and states. Judging by the investment of states in cultural activities, Cultural diplomacy is broadly perceived as valuable and the consensus seems overwhelming with a view to its potential to maximise soft power.

How cultural products are actually received abroad, comes rarely under scrutiny. From the perspective of the process of reception, one can see the extent to which audiences are involved in the process of meaning-making, deeply linked to the articulation of identity. By understanding the process of reception of cultural products, cultural policy can gain real impact.

In a 2014 report¹⁹ for the British Council, the facilitation of cultural relations enjoys a growing interest as vector in achieving the creation of positive impressions, of familiarity and of influence over the behaviour of individuals or over a society as a whole. While the report gives a comprehensive review of cultural activities around the globe, an evaluation of the actual impact is missing. There is an obvious lack of criteria in assessing how cultural policy actions can achieve expected results not only from an academic point of view but also in the way policy is developed.

¹⁸ European Commission Press Release, The European Union remains world's leading donor of Official Development Assistance, 16 April 2020, Brussels

¹⁹ Howson Paul, Dubber John, Culture matters – Why culture should be at the heart of future public policy, publish by the British Council, 2014

The only way to optimize the use of the various EU instruments at our disposal in order to convert a cultural or soft power into economic growth is to exercise a systematic monitoring of the impact of cultural diplomacy in the various countries. While it is easy to measure the financial investment of the EU and the economic evolution of the partner countries, it is much more difficult to measure the connection between the two. An important indicator is to measure the perception of citizens in each country, but this should be done systematically and periodically. It is essential to adapt the EU response according to the situation and the cultural perceptions in the various countries. The European values that are a condition to economic growth can be arrived at on different roads and it is necessary that the involved EU institutions like the EEAS develop the flexibility to discover the optimal road in each partner country.

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