

# ***Portugal and Cultural Diplomacy***

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## **The Portuguese language beyond its borders**

The scope of this essay is to briefly to reflect upon the main characteristics of Portuguese cultural diplomacy throughout the twentieth century until today.

Like big western powers such as France, the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States of America, so does Portugal display *soft power*<sup>1</sup>, present not only in the Portuguese speaking world, said “lusophone” world, but also all around the globe.

The presence of the Portuguese language and culture beyond national borders became more evident from the fifteenth century with the beginning of the Discoveries and the relevant Portuguese contribution for the movement of globalisation thus initiated.

The first efforts for the promotion of Portuguese language and culture abroad began in 1415, with the conquest of Ceuta, in Morocco. “The Portuguese were the first European power to project themselves, and their language across the Atlantic and hence into the world at large.”<sup>2</sup> After this symbolic milestone, the Portuguese language never ceased to acquire an increasing universalistic character. The history of the Discoveries led Nicholas Ostler to designate the Portuguese language as an *imperial language*<sup>3</sup>, the same as English, French, or Spanish. The Portuguese language expanded as an instrument of trade, international communication, i.e. as a *lingua franca* during the first centuries of Iberian colonization of Asia, America and Africa, not only spoken by local elites but soon also by the working classes and the newly converted Christians. Therefore, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were set the

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<sup>1</sup> Nye, Joseph. *Soft Power - The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Ostler, Nicholas. *Empires of the Word - A Language History of the World*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005: 382.

<sup>3</sup> Ostler, Nicholas. “Síntese da intervenção de Nicholas Ostler”, *Promoção da Língua portuguesa no Mundo*, Ed. Fundação Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento. Lisboa: FLAD, 2008. 25.

foundations for the transeuropean expansion of Portuguese language and culture, which nowadays has become the sixth most spoken language in the world, with a community of 240 millions speakers<sup>4</sup>, spoken as an official language in 8 countries. “Ultimately, then, the growth of Portuguese to its present status [...] owes almost everything to the economic development, and consequent population growth of Brazil over the past three hundred years, and very little to its spread from Portugal as a language for colonial administration, or as a *lingua franca* in Asia, both of which peaked over four hundred years ago.”<sup>5</sup> The importance of Brazil in the promotion of the Portuguese language is evident even today, as most of the Portuguese native speakers are Brazilian and Brazil is an emergent BRIC power.

The countries that were under Portuguese colonial rule for five centuries, namely Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe and Portugal have signed the constitutional declaration of the Community of the Portuguese speaking countries (*Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa – CPLP*), in July 1996, joined later by East Timor. The CPLP is an international organisation that aims to promote joint initiatives in order to foster social and economical development for the Portuguese speaking peoples, having Lusophonia as a common denominator. Although difficult to define, the concept of Lusophonia is the basis of CPLP, in a similar way to *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* for French, and the *Commonwealth* for English.

The growing importance of the promotion of the Portuguese language taken on by the CPLP members, faced with the challenges of globalisation, led to the attempt of strengthening of Portuguese as a “global language” and implementation of common language policies during the last Conference of CPLP Heads of State and Government, that occurred in Lisbon in July 2008.

Since 2002 the defence of Portuguese language and different Portuguese speaking cultures is the main task of the International Institute of Portuguese language (*Instituto Internacional da Língua Portuguesa – IILP*), with headquarters in Cape

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<sup>4</sup> Vide <http://diario.iol.pt/sociedade/lingua-portuguesa-portugues-ensino-governo-alunos/972503-4071.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ostler, Nicholas. *Empires of the Word - A Language History of the World*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2005: 395.

Verde. Starting as an imperial language during the Portuguese colonial empire that only fell after the revolution of 1974, in Lisbon, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Portuguese is looking to become a language that is effectively shared by all peoples and societies that express themselves in Portuguese.

## **Portuguese public and cultural diplomacy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Even though the roots of the promotion of Portuguese language and culture can be found in the expansion of the Portuguese people overseas, that began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and mainly in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this task was only fully undertaken by the Portuguese state in a structured way from the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similar to France, that founded the Alliance Francaise in 1883, or the United Kingdom that created the British Council in 1934, Portugal founded the *Junta de Educaão Nacional* in 1929, a service that ensured the presence of Portuguese lecturers in foreign universities. It is believed that this institution, after several changes and restructurings, became Instituto Camoes. This Portuguese institute responsible for the promotion of Portuguese language and culture abroad, officially founded in 1992, has celebrated eighty years of existence in 2009.

The end of the totalitarian regime under Antonio de Oliveira Salazar that lasted from 1926 until 1974 has radically changed the way Portugal sees the importance of its public and cultural diplomacy. This transformation became more evident after joining the European Economic Community in 1986. Portugal finally opened itself to the world after decades of isolationist and colonialist politics.

It was mainly in the nineties that Portugal seriously started relevant projects that aimed to project a new image of the country abroad, such as Europalia in 1991, Lisbon European capital of culture in 1994, the presence of Portugal in the Frankfurt in 1997 and the World Exhibition Expo 98, commemorating five hundred years of the arrival of Vasco da Gama, the famous Portuguese navigator, to India in 1498, having as its main theme the importance of the oceans as a global heritage for the future. This big event was particularly important for the international visibility of Portugal as a modern country open to the world. Expo 98 was followed other big events of

Portuguese public diplomacy in the new millennium, namely Porto as the European capital of culture in 2001 and European football championship in 2004.

It was also during the nineties that Portugal invested in mass media communications on an international level. During the second government of Prime Minister Cavaco Silva mass media started to be considered an important strategic instrument to produce and broadcast national programs either to Portuguese communities living abroad or to the so called “PALOP” countries<sup>6</sup> as a way to straighten cooperation and emphasize the universalistic nature of Portuguese language and internationally project Lusophonia. Nowadays Portugal has several international television channels, such as RTP Internacional and RTP Africa and the radio channel RDP Africa. As instruments of public diplomacy these international channels are quite different from other international broadcasting services from other countries, such as BBC, *Voice of America* or *Deutsche Welle TV*, because they only broadcast in Portuguese, which makes it harder to reach non-Portuguese speaking audiences.

Also during the 1990s, similarly to French, British and German tradition of creating a net of high schools abroad, so did Portuguese government established Portuguese schools, insuring primary and secondary education according to the Portuguese school system, to local elites and Portuguese emigrants, in some countries that used be under Portuguese colonial rule until the 1970s. Presently about 4500<sup>7</sup> students attend these schools that are considered important instruments of Portuguese cooperation abroad, through which Portuguese culture is reaching out to younger generations as a way of using *soft power* to attract African and Asian elites. The first of these schools to be created in 1994 was the Portuguese School of Luanda Angola, followed by the Portuguese School of Macau in 1998 and after that the Portuguese School of Mozambique, in Maputo, in 1999. Finally after independence process of East Timor, the Portuguese School of Dili became functional in 2002.

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<sup>6</sup> PALOP is the acronym for *Paises Africanos de lingua oficial portuguesa*, i.e., African countries with Portuguese official language.

<sup>7</sup> Vide <http://www.gepe.min-edu.pt/np4/np4/48>

## **The Instituto Camões as the main player for Portuguese cultural diplomacy**

There are different players on a national level that help to promote Portugal abroad through actions of public and cultural diplomacy. The main player for Portuguese cultural diplomacy, as a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, alongside other organisms belonging to the public administration, is Instituto Camões, officially created in 1992, in order to foster the promotion of Portuguese language and culture in foreign higher education institutions and reinforce culture cooperation policies of countries belonging to the CPLP / Portuguese speaking countries community.

In 2009, Instituto Camões has a teaching network in four continents, in 66 countries and 274 universities. There are 54 Portuguese language centres and 425 Portuguese lecturers that not only teach Portuguese as a foreign or as a second language but also implement cultural projects to promote Portuguese contemporary culture. There are also projects for the continuous training of foreign teachers teaching Portuguese especially in Africa. Regarding Portuguese used as a language for work, communication, science, law, diplomacy, business and tourism, in 2008 Instituto Camões cooperated with 25 institutions namely in Algeria, Tunisia, Sao Tome e Principe, South Africa and Guinea Bissau, for example the African Bank for Development (BAD), the national parliaments of Dili, Bissau and Cape Town. Alongside this teaching network, Instituto Camões also grants a hundred scholarships to foreign student annually. Instituto Camões coordinates the cultural initiatives of Portuguese consulates and embassies through an annual plan of activities that reached about 900 projects in 2008. There are also 19 Portuguese Cultural Centres, three in Europe, namely in Paris, Luxembourg and Vigo; in Asia, in Beijing, New Deli, Tokyo, Bangkok; in Oceania, in Dili; and in Africa, in Luanda, Maputo and Beira, Praia and Mindelo, Sao Tome and the island of Principe, in Rabat and Casablanca and Bissau; finally, in America, in Brasilia. Since 1954, when the first cultural agreement was established with the United Kingdom, Portugal has signed 75 cultural agreements with foreign countries, mainly in Europe.

Nowadays Instituto Camões is promoting training to translators and interpreters in international organisations where Portuguese is working language such as CEDEAO, in Nigeria; SADC, in Botswana; African Union in Ethiopia; and BAD, in Tunisia. In some of these international organisations the Portuguese government has established Portuguese language centres that offer Portuguese courses as a foreign language, promote cultural activities and include a library with Portuguese books and audiovisual equipments in a similar concept to the “American corner”.

Currently Instituto Camões is implementing different strategies to improve networking with all foreign institutions that work towards the promotion of Portuguese language and culture abroad, to develop deeper relationships with CPLP countries, Iberian and American countries and North Atlantic Treat Organization (NATO) members, entering areas considered strategic to Portuguese interests such as the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, (Association of South East Asian Nations) ASEAN, and Gulf countries. The main objectives are to increase the visibility of Portuguese language and culture and project a positive and modern image of Portugal, to defend multilingualism as part of the UE linguistic policies and to cooperate with similar cultural diplomacy institutions of other countries. Alongside these strategic orientations, Instituto Camões cooperates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in fostering European integration, reinforcing the Atlantic Alliance and promoting Lusophonia ties among the members of the CPLP.

## **Portuguese language - New challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

During the last decades there has been increasing interest and demand for the Portuguese language abroad and therefore there are new challenges being faced. According to the latest data there are 240 million Portuguese speakers in the world. Portuguese is the third European language and ranks sixth amongst the most spoken in the world, which makes it a strategic language for the European Union and the CPLP. With the demographic growth these values tend to increase, especially in Brazil, as mentioned previously.

The Portuguese government is well aware of the importance of a coherent and structured international promotion of the Portuguese language and the economic value that will thus derive, since according to a recent study it corresponds to 17% of the Gross National Product. The growing demand for Portuguese language, for instance in China, is mainly due to economic and business reasons related to emerging markets such as Brazil and Angola.

On a European level, Portugal takes part in organizations created to implement cultural and linguistic politics of the European Union, such as intercultural dialogue and multilingualism. Through the Instituto Camões, Portugal is one of the members of European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) and the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL). The main objective of EUNIC and EFNIL is to improve the European identity, which is deeply linked to cultural and linguistic diversity, based on the principle “unity in diversity”. Nowadays there are 31 EUNIC cluster all around the world. These clusters of European cultural institutions engage themselves in common cultural projects, contributing to an effective European integration on a cultural level.

## **Conclusions**

In 2009 Portugal celebrated 80 years of cultural diplomacy initiatives, 17 of which mark the foundation of Instituto Camões. Despite the obvious efforts to promote Portuguese culture and language abroad in strategic geopolitical areas, the Portuguese cultural policies are rather criticized by some intellectual and political sectors of Portuguese society, mainly due to the lack of visibility of many of these actions.

Like in the rest of the world, Portugal has also recognized the growing importance of cultural diplomacy and politicians in the media often mention this. Nevertheless, in Portugal the concepts of cultural and public diplomacy are still rather rhetorical, as the yearly budget given to Instituto Camões is less than 15 million euros, which makes it difficult for the Instituto to respond to the increased the demand for Portuguese culture and language.

In order to be able to face the ideological challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a century when a war of ideas is being fought, Portugal will have develop coherent strategies of cultural diplomacy, following the successful examples and best practises of other nations, such as the United States during the cold war, or France and Germany.

It is crucial to launch a debate about the *national interest* and the *national role* of Portugal in this new century. With the aim of improving cooperation between all the Portuguese governmental players that interact to promote Portuguese cultural and diplomacy abroad, besides Instituto Camões, and the private sector, the concept of the Portuguese *national brand* should also be clearly defined.

Finally, with the purpose of actually contributing for peace and understanding amongst different peoples and countries, as the basic ideal of cultural diplomacy, and not just economic interests, it would be important if Portuguese cultural diplomacy would rely more on the concepts of reciprocity and mutuality that are somehow still lacking in the Portuguese strategies.

The main obstacle that cultural diplomacy faces is the incapacity to forecast in advance what results will be achieved and when. Promoting cultural diplomacy is based in the faith that someday the investment will bring good results<sup>8</sup>. As Cynthia Schneider defends “soft power requires hard dollars”<sup>9</sup>. Therefore it is necessary to invest means and financial resources, if Portugal seriously intends to put into action a integrated plan of cultural diplomacy.

As long as Portugal’s cultural diplomacy methods remain largely rhetorical its results will be below what could be achieved considering the high potential and the universalistic character of Portuguese language and culture.

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<sup>8</sup> Cummings, Milton, “Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: a Survey”, Washington, D.C., Center for Arts and Culture, 2003, page 14.

<sup>9</sup> Schneider, Cynthia P., “Culture Communicates: US Diplomacy That Works”, The New Public Diplomacy – Soft Power in International Relations, Ed. Jan Melissen. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. page 163.



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