

## **A Common European cultural policy in the European Union**

Dr. Fabrice Serodes

### **Introduction: a pledge for a European cultural diplomacy**

Jean Monnet's quote on starting the European Union all over again with culture may be a fake<sup>1</sup>, culture still remains an empty field in a global context of economic crisis. Many citizens even question the need for a European cultural diplomacy. The member states already perform quite well on their own through notorious national institutions: ministries, embassies or cultural agencies.

In the United States the revival of cultural diplomacy is a consequence of 9/11. The attacks were partly seen as a lack of "mutual understanding and dialogue between civilisations" since the end of the Cold War. Significantly, in Europe, the attacks on Madrid and London didn't have the same impact on the European Union and are considered as national tragedies rather than European issues. The need for a stronger Union to cope with the risk of terrorism or territorial fragmentation was not obvious.

There are however many useful aspects of cultural diplomacy. It appears as part of the solution to various contemporary issues:

- the recognition of complex and multicultural identities, which are not yet taken into account in the global vision European people have of other European countries. Their current visions still rely on old national stereotypes.
- a lack of mutual understanding leading to nationalist policies and the rise of populist parties.
- no clear visibility of a common European brand abroad in a competitive environment
- a waste of money in cultural competition abroad at festivals and exhibitions.
- a weak cultural jobmarket with only two to three million people working at the moment for the cultural industry.

For all these reasons it is in the interest of European states and institutions to promote a cultural diplomacy at a European level

### **I The financial, legal and mental framework: limited means for cultural diplomacy.**

#### **1. Not enough funds for European cultures.**

---

<sup>1</sup> See A. Mirlesse, *Waiting for Europe*, Paris, La Contreallée, 2009.

The consequences of the current economic crisis are easy to see in the cultural field: budget cuts, closing cultural agencies...Culture is still considered as a luxury, not an investment. As such, it is one of the first scapegoats of austerity policies.

European cultural diplomacy's budget is not growing. In 2005, the EU budget for culture represented 0.12% of the entire EU budget. The Culture Programme 2007-2013 costs € 400 million (1/3 of French cultural diplomacy). For the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 the Commission proposes to allocate €1.6 billion for the cultural sector. It is still less than 1€ per capita and year, that is 0,16% of the entire EU budget, a growth of 0,003% in 15 years.

The cultural diplomacy will hence rely on national budget. They set a bad example and are in competition abroad. In 2007 the British Council announced a change in the nature of the services it provides in the field of culture in Europe. Funding of EU-based offices was reduced by £20 million; 10 offices are to be shut down in Austria and in the new member states (Hungary, Slovenia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Latvia and Estonia). The French government too has shut down two French institutes in Spain (Sevilla and Bilbao) in 2005 and 2006. In Germany more than half of the French cultural institutes were shut down. Europe – whether Western and or Eastern - is not anymore a priority of national cultural diplomacies.

## 2.A narrow framework basis for a European cultural diplomacy.

Legitimation was granted for EU action on culture since Maastricht. It is regulated by article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The scope of this Community action is defined in the four paragraphs of Art. 167.2: “to improve the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples, to conserve and safeguard cultural heritage of European significance, non-commercial cultural exchanges and artistic and literary creation, including in the audio-visual sector”. The idea of “respecting” national and regional diversity limits Community activity. At the moment, it is not used very much by member states.

The Lisbon Treaty is too weak and underestimates Europe as a cultural project<sup>2</sup>. The field of action on cultural issues as defined by article 6 of the Treaty is to support and supplement national policy, and to always respect the principle of “subsidiarity”. In other words, the European Union does not have a common policy on culture as it does on other areas. The Treaty of Lisbon extends the use of qualified majority voting in the Council to over forty matters, including Culture, for which previously unanimity was required (art. 16 of the Treaty on the European Union). The qualified majority shall facilitate decision-making, but it had no important consequences so far on cultural issues or cultural

---

<sup>2</sup> Manifesto “Pour une Europe fondée sur la culture”, *Le Monde*, 2004 signed by C. Abbado, C. Bartoli, M. Béjart, P. Boulez, P. Chéreau, A.T. de Keersmaeker, A. Rahman el Bacha, A. Maalouf, R. Muti, I. Spahic, A. Wajda...

action abroad. The European External Action Service (EEAS) does not include any positions relating to cultural aspects<sup>3</sup>. At the moment, there is no common cultural policy of the European Union<sup>4</sup>.

A common EU strategy on culture in the EU's external actions is lacking. One of the strategic objectives of the 2007 European Agenda for Culture was the promotion of culture as a vital element in the European Union's international relations. Under the Work Plan for Culture 2011-14, adopted last November by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, 'Culture in external relations' is identified as a priority area. Significantly, it hasn't led so far to cultural merging like common regional or bilateral cultural centers or initiatives.

### 3. The lack of a Common European cultural identity.

The global context is not helping. Citizens react to globalization by underlining national, regional and local traditions, which might turn to negative. In 2008, 65% of Cypriots, 63% of Greeks and more than half of citizens in France and Slovenia, (53% and 52% respectively) and the United Kingdom and Estonia (both 51%) consider globalization as a threat to their culture. There are deep-rooted reasons.

- Geographical distance and slow communication remain an obstacle in some regions.
- Education is also part of the answer, as a minority of European citizens has yet real "intercultural competences".
- The TV programs are more crucial to understand this divide. There is no common European programme so far.
- But there are also personal reasons. There is an ignorance and lack of curiosity of contemporary and visual arts of neighbour countries. Seen from a Western viewpoint, it remains difficult to recognize some foreign cultures and to deal with them as equal partners. Andrei Plesu, Ilmar Raag are not very familiar names in Western Europe. The weight of American cultural productions becomes the only common point.

## **II. The new European cultural diplomacy**

### 1. The real goal of a European cultural diplomacy.

The efforts to build a cultural diplomacy are also reduced by the still seducing idea that we have to look for a common goal, when we should already define some basic values like democracy, universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. But cultural unification is impossible<sup>5</sup>. There must be a value added in both cultural and economic terms. A common cultural policy should help the weakest cultures to emerge. This common policy would be part of the global European exports. The EU has

---

<sup>3</sup> Council Decision of 26 July 2010 establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service (2010/427/EU)

<sup>4</sup> Michael Reitener, Symposium The Role of culture in the Age of Advancing Globalisation, Japan, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2003.

<sup>5</sup> J. Habermas, *Why Europe needs a constitution*, 2001.

taken the lead to promote cultural diversity in the frame of the UNESCO Convention of 2005 on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The third paragraph of article 167 invites the Union and Member States to foster “co-operation with third countries and the competent international organizations in the sphere of culture, in particular the Council of Europe”.

## 2. The limits of unilateralism & bilateral relations

Cultural diplomacy remains mainly a national initiative. Governments try to capitalize a particular field of expertise during the national presidencies every 6 months. The enlargement has strengthened this trend. Instead of cultural relations with neighbor countries, they promote their image in Europe to build new alliances and promote their image. Cultural cooperation among the accessing country has even been reduced, except for the Baltic States. Governments are firm believers in bilateral agreements. More than 300 bilateral agreements are in force in 31 European countries (EU27+Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway) at the moment. It relies on reciprocity, hence the expression “cultural relations” rather than “cultural diplomacy”. Intergovernmental cultural cooperation tends to address general audiences through large events. But it is fragile. Since 1999, for example, Hungary and Romania have had a bilateral agreement whereby they promote each other's literature, books, films. In 1992, a Hungarian cultural centre opened in the capital of Romania, Bucharest, and a Romanian cultural centre was opened in the capital of Hungary, Budapest. Because of the crisis and the change in policies, non official and off performances budgets are now cancelled and people are fired whereas funds are transferred to help Magyar minorities abroad. A concert organized by the Romanian embassy given in the National Theater had to be cancelled under the pressure of far right parties, insisting on the loss of Transylvania in 1918 as an obstacle to present cultural cooperation. This national cultural diplomacy has nothing to do with cultural exchanges nor European cultural diplomacy.

## 3. The latest external initiatives

Only a few can really be called “European” ( European Cultural capitals, Europeana). There is some progress abroad. To brand Europe is about switching the thinking in terms of "Europe in the World" instead of differences between member states. The European Neighbourhood



Policy (ENP), the Eastern Partnership, the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which all have resources allocated to cultural programmes. Culture is part of the ACP agreements; a Protocol on culture has been added to the EU Cariforum in 2008. Media Mundus, the European Commission's new international co-operation

programme for the audiovisual industry, subscribes to this ambition. In May 2011 MEPs advocated setting up a "cultural diplomacy" directorate within the EU External Action Service.

### **Conclusion. A series of recommendations to promote European cultural diplomacy**

Europe is not anymore the cultural center of the world but has still a lot to offer. The main challenge it faces at the moment is to avoid to become a giant museum, or worse another Disneyland, and to act as a global player. In a recent report, the European Parliament has suggested some new ideas on cultural diplomacy abroad<sup>6</sup>. I would recommend some suggestions to go further and to make culture a fundamental component of policies at home and abroad.

1. A **Common cultural agenda** should be adopted by the Presidency and the Council for a same time period as the budget.
2. The Commission should adopt a **document on a strategy on culture** in the EU's external actions.
3. Cultural exchange should be part of the European **citizenship** like the voting right to European elections. A European cultural passport merged with the Erasmus should be delivered especially to younger generations.
4. There should be decisions taken on **shared cultural offices abroad** with a European label and European funds mentioned in the Budget.
5. Is it a good thing to have one single representative responsible for culture, like a common cultural ambassador? Not necessary to add another position, but it should be the duty of present EU officials abroad to be cultural ambassadors as well. The main issue is to recruit specialists in the cultural field. We've got to change the **recruitment** process as cultural issues were removed. Culture should't be let to managers.

### **Sources**

J. Habermas, *Why Europe needs a constitution*, 2001.

Collectif, *L'Arme de la culture*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006.

I.F.A, Culture Progress, *Culture Report 2007*.

Ecotec, *Final Report of the Evaluation of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008*, august 2009

A.Mirlesse, *Waiting for Europe*, Paris, La Contreallée, 2009.

Marietje Schaake, *Cultural diplomacy: To sell European culture and values globally*, European Parliament, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2010.

---

<sup>6</sup> Marietje Schaake, *Cultural diplomacy: To sell European culture and values globally*, European Parliament, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2010 and May 2011.