

Cultural Diplomacy and the European Union: Key Characters and Historical Development

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Introduction

Cultural diplomacy is not a new phenomenon. It has been present and active in the world, in one form or another, under one name or another, since the beginning of civilization. The meaning of cultural diplomacy in the modern world has therefore been closely investigated, especially in the twentieth century. This paper puts analytical focus on the role of cultural diplomacy in the European Union (EU).

Due to its national diversity, the European Union enables a peculiar environment for the development of cultural diplomacy. Nowhere else in the world can one find so many different national identities gathered under the roof of one entity – even if that entity is in fact ‘constitution-less’; the chances for cultural exchange and the promotion of national interests could hardly be better. The aims of European unification are more visible and are somehow becoming more streamline in European foreign policies, even on national levels. Nevertheless, Jürgen Habermas' claims that Europeans would never preserve in the integration process based solely on economic grounds and that, on the other hand, cultural unification is impossible – he believes that European nations and nation-states are too keen to conserve their national culture and identity and any form of a melting pot is therefore unthinkable (Habermas, 2001).

The more politically integrated European countries become, the more polemics arise on the subject of ‘Europe’ becoming a melting pot of cultures. Cultural diplomacy itself can play a significant role here by simply serving as a tool for making integration more legitimate, bringing public consciousness towards acknowledging that a politically more connected Union does not equal ‘cultural dis-identification’ of a given member state.

In the following text this paper will try to establish the role that cultural diplomacy plays in the European Union, establish who exactly influenced the European Union’s evolution with their political, cultural or socio-political approaches and try to find out how we can identify their work and with the help of research on their background place an emphasis on the real significance of cultural diplomacy in EU.

What is Cultural Diplomacy?

Before switching to the case study itself it makes sense to try to define what cultural diplomacy is. Even though the term itself causes a lot of curiosity and speculation, we are able to provide quite specific definitions. However, considering that the terms 'culture' and 'diplomacy' are not completely self-explanatory terms, a definition of the two terms would better evidence how they work in conjunction

Culture¹: Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and collective efforts.

Diplomacy²: The art or practice of conducting international relations, as in negotiating alliances, treaties, and agreements; tact and skill in dealing with people.

'Cultural Diplomacy' has nothing to do with diplomacy used when describing relationships between diplomats and government representatives. But it has much to do with the fact that it describes various modes of cultural exchange when trying to, for example, negotiate a treaty, make an alliance or achieve further understanding of another country. It is not limited to a certain space or time, though it has to involve a 'dialogue' of all the specific parties involved on a subject that concerns 'culture-related' issues. For example: organized work of people forming the national diaspora in whichever country (e.g. an African in The UK); a musician promoting his/her country's image abroad; the exchange of information on the basis of cooperation in art, education, science, development, etc.

How does the European integration process collide with Cultural Diplomacy?

The most significant question that arises in the first part of the case study is related to the role of cultural diplomacy in the pan-European integration process. Taking for granted that the European Union is based on diversity and not equality we can understand that the representatives of cultural diplomacy can be found on almost every national level. If we accept the fact that an important aspect of cultural diplomacy comes

¹ <http://www.tamu.edu/classes/cosc/choudhury/culture.html>

² <http://www.answers.com/topic/diplomacy>

from *the ability to produce understanding* (among those who form the EU) *that goes beyond stereotyped images* and to mould perceptions in a favorable way in order to move a little closer to understanding what the role of cultural diplomacy within the European Union could be.

The European Union's composition is in no way similar to that of traditional Federational systems and it is in no way similar to any kind of constitutional entity because it is unique in its supranational framing. Therefore, the need for ambassadors of cultural exchange in the eyes of the Union as such becomes a very relevant subject. If we establish that the countries constituting the European Union have no common history - therefore no common historical memories and that they are also divided by cultural differences, we come to an agreement that the exchange of knowledge, interests, ambitions, culture, and experience count as something relevant. The contribution of so-called cultural diplomats to the success or the future of the Union is therefore worth analyzing. Would it be irrational to claim that the future of the EU in a way depends on the success of cultural diplomacy?

The following presents two relevant personalities of the European Union who took part in the integration process and contributed relevantly to the promotion of cultural diplomacy in 'Europe'.

Case study: Ambassadors of cultural diplomacy within the EU

Robert Schuman (1886-1963)

A very influential figure in post-war Europe, Robert Schuman is also regarded as a founding father of the EU, the Council of Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). When it comes to the cultural aspect of his biography he is particularly interesting because of his international family background (neither his father nor his mother were originally German). Some people refer to him as 'a man of several cultures'.

However, when Robert Schuman proposed a plan (later called The Schuman Plan) in 1950 that suggested an implementation, once put into practice, of 'permanent control over German war industries with the inclusion of Germany in a supranational European Union' (Willis: 1971), he did not look for a cultural exchange between nations but more for an environment that would provide Europe with peace and allow it safe grounds for economic progress. However, Robert Schuman and his team happened to achieve not

only the goal (European Community for Steel and Coal came into practice in 1951 and was followed by two new communities, EEC and EURATOM only six years after) but they also built the grounds for further integration. Even though the protagonists of the whole process, Germany and France, were promoting the integration for different reasons – France was trying to control the still volatile Germany and Germany was taking advantage of its role in the new political arena which would prove to be unachievable without its involvement in the integration process – The EC demonstrated quite impressive results a short time after being established. Robert Schuman became the first president of the European Parliamentary Assembly in 1958 until 1960 (succeeded by European Parliament in 1962). Taking into consideration that as a President of European Parliament Schuman represented the Community in all legal matters and externally, particularly international relations, we have to take a look into what was happening in the EC in the period of Schuman's presidency so we can, on the basis of 'soft power' used for conducting international relations, establish his contribution to the cultural diplomacy in the Community.

Even though the European Community was considered to be in the initial period of its existence until the beginning of sixties, much happened under Schuman's parliamentary presidency. Considering the background deriving from the German-French relationship, Schuman successfully penetrated the idea of mutual understanding on the common European goals between the two countries (they were successfully involved in economic cooperation by 1958). On 11th -13th July 1958 a conference was held in Stresa, Italy which laid down the basis for a common agricultural policy. The Stresa Conference agreed on a principle of price supports for agricultural products; this means that when prices within the Community fall below an agreed price for agricultural products, the Community will intervene to raise the price by buying the commodity. Two years later the Council of Ministers agreed to Commission proposals to accelerate the creation of a common market by removing internal barriers to trade and creating a common external tariff. The Commission links progress on the common market to the creation of a Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).³

Regardless of the importance of the position Schuman was filling in the Parliamentary Assembly during 1958 and 1960 we have to know that his most qualitative years, in terms of European endeavor, happened at the beginning and with the beginning of the integration process itself. Schuman's significance concerning the cultural diplomacy in European Community/Union lay in the fact that he initiated the process through which the idea of cultural diplomacy was able to come to power. We can't claim that the

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http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/eulaw/resources/timeline/eutimeline_nov07.pdf

concept of CD lives because of what Robert Schuman proposed in his plan on 9th May 1950, but we can sum up that Schuman's contribution to cultural diplomacy is alive and we can easily list its results: European exchange study programs, cultural exchange programs, work exchange programs, foreign language promotion programs, etc.

Mark C. Donfried and Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht in their book titled Introduction to searching for a Cultural Diplomacy mention that during the cold war period the United States invested large amounts of money and energy to promote the arts, academic exchanges, and cultural self-presentation with the one purpose: 'win the minds of men in Europe'. Those actions are relevant to this study because the European Union has been on the brink of future uncertainties for quite some time, and it is becoming clear that the problem of cultural diversity internally is not making those uncertainties much more certain. In order to provide a 'European plan' with more stability and success, the EU launched initiatives that can be paralleled with those mentioned above by the United States. European non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and similar organizations have promoted the essence of the European Union more than at any other time before. Much money, time, effort and energy have been invested in organizing cultural exchange events (various film festivals, music festivals, language schools, art colonies, etc) to bring European country number 1 closer to European country number 2 while getting help from the European country number 3.

The purpose is irrelevant if we are able to define the value of the Schuman's heritage in the field of cultural diplomacy and the value of it can be insinuated with one very simply sentence: if the ideas of Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Henri Spaak, Alcide de Gasperi, never manifested, and if Europeans did not have the ability to freely and easily travel, work and live in another European country—if there was no EU, in other words—we couldn't personally take part in many forms of cultural diplomacy. It would, however, be much less possible to 'promote' national culture abroad to the extent that it is today.

Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970)

Charles de Gaulle is not a typical example of a cultural diplomacy ambassador and was in some ways an antipode of Robert Schuman. However, because de Gaulle is considered influential in the history of the EU, his persona deserves mention in this case study.

In the context of European integration Charles de Gaulle is usually referred to as someone who was not particularly fond of the idea. He was, for example, twice opposed to Great Britain's accession to the Community. One could argue that that does not offer

too much of a cultural diplomacy dimension – how could someone who attempted to block the entrance of another country twice by any means be described as a cultural diplomat? Nevertheless, if one approaches the problem from another perspective and remembers the reasons for his decision you can see that that case does not suggest that de Gaulle was in no way interested in negotiating with Great Britain or prepared for cooperation, it could – quite on the contrary – be argued that he only wanted Great Britain to be prepared to do the same.

Taking a brief look into the history of French-Britain disagreements concerning the European integration project, we can understand what this essay is suggesting. Great Britain has been for decades described as an awkward partner in its relationship with the European Union and it was not any different fifty five years ago when it was first joining the Community. Firstly, Great Britain's idea was to reestablish itself to the leading position in Europe which it lost at the turn of the century with the crumbling of its Empire. Or, Britain wanted to at least come closer to the circle of countries that were advancing politically and economically. The European Community proved to be a good way of achieving this goal at the beginning of the sixties and the British soon started to realize that it was better to join than to maintain the leading position externally, with the use of its Commonwealth.

Unfortunately for Britain, Charles de Gaulle foresaw their strategy and vetoed their accession. Moreover, de Gaulle had a second reason which convinced him not to let Great Britain into the team of the Six. Great Britain was very closely connected to the United States and was representing the one side of the so-called 'special relationship' between the countries. Even if some professionals still doubt that the 'special relationship' was special for both parties equally, Great Britain and the United States developed a close relationship based on their common culture and interests. One of the most important reasons for Charles de Gaulle's decision on Great Britain's accession was therefore the 'speculation' that Great Britain's interests were more biased towards American, rather than European politics and that Great Britain's heart was on 'the American side of the bridge'.

However, Charles de Gaulle was much more than just a politician who strictly disapproved the rising of power of European Commission and therefore fought for a looser European Union. Under his presidency from 1959-69, France decided to remain in the Common Market and promote the Common Agricultural Policy. One of the more radical suggestions that de Gaulle had was the Fouchet Plan in early 1960s with which he intended to protect the role of national states in the European community. His idea was

therefore to propose a less supranational 'Union of States'. However, due to the success of the European Community and the lack of enthusiasm by other member states The Fouchet Plan was never implemented. Further on, France again vetoed Britain's accession to the community and provoked the 'empty chair crisis' which resulted in France not attending the Council's meetings for six months and ended with the Luxemburg compromise (that gave each member state the right to veto a decision that it believed would affect its national interests).

However radical de Gaulle's ideas might seem at first glance, he knew how to introduce French national interests to the heads-of-States and he knew particularly well how to defend them. His contribution to cultural diplomacy can therefore be summed up in the following lines. Under de Gaulle's leadership, European unity got the first straight forward promoter of national interests inside the Union which in a way changed the perception of Europeans not only concerning France but the Union itself. De Gaulle's 'politics' are known to have advocates as well as opponents around the whole of Europe which offers us a nice headword into prospective research: can cultural diplomacy also be a tool of 'cultural exchange' which does not necessarily offer a positive image of a nation abroad?

Sources

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