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The current political situation and the time constraints in place for the Preparatory Action's enquiry have not allowed for a proper consultation process to be undertaken in Belarus. This note is the result of desk research and online consultation with a limited number of stakeholders. It therefore provides only a single snapshot at the given moment. It is not a full-fledged analysis of the cultural relations between Europe and Belarus.

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OVERVIEW

Under the authoritarian regime in place since the 1990s, citizens of Belarus have had limited opportunities to engage culturally with Europe, the continent to which their country historically, geographically and culturally belongs. Human rights violations, despite the short-lived 2008-2010 liberalisation, have cast a shadow on relations with the EU (which applies sanctions on the President and other political figures) and other international organisations like the OSCE. Cultural relations, in such a context, have become highly politicised, while the country's economic, financial and security reliance on Russia has brought Belarus even closer to its Eastern neighbour. In the cultural field, the first phase of independence coincided with some revival of the national culture. The authorities have since supported or encouraged cultural practices aligned with Russian ones. The cultural landscape of Belarus is fragmented and difficult to identify due to limited transparency, limited freedom of expression, and political repression. The Ukrainian crisis has contributed to maintaining tensions in the region, making prospects of enhanced cultural relations even more unpredictable.

THE CULTURAL POLICY LANDSCAPE AND RELATIONS WITH THE EU

Although Belarus does not have an official strategy for external cultural relations, this policy area is addressed in a number of documents such as, to name but a few, the government programmes on culture and on the development of tourism for 2011-2015, laws on culture (1991), heritage (2006), museums (2005), cinemas (2004) or workers and unions in the creative sector (1999). The promotion of both cultural heritage and local cultural development has become an official priority.¹ Since 1992, the country has signed 33 international agreements on culture with EU Member States, Russia, China, India, Iran, South Africa and Turkey.² Belarus has approved the UNESCO Conventions on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions (2005) and on intangible cultural heritage (2003).³

As far as state policies are concerned, priority is given to immediate neighbours (Russia and close EU Member States like Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine), former Soviet Republics (Azerbaijan), but also to some extent Germany, Italy and France.⁴ Cultural production in Russian mostly targets Russia, Poland and Lithuania. State policies focus on three clusters of objectives: cultural diplomacy for the promotion of Belarus' culture internationally; the enhancement of Belarusian national identity inside the country and within its neighbourhood (Russia, Ukraine and Poland); and the enrichment of citizens' cultural life.⁵ These objectives contrast with the fact that most of the staff in ministries dealing with culture has very little experience of working and studying abroad.⁶

Local authorities have some competences in dealing with culture in external relations, provided they ensure the unity of state policies. One example of external cultural relations managed at local level is the organisation in 2013 of the cultural days of the Kaliningrad *oblast* (an administrative territorial entity of Russia) in the region of Brest.⁷

External cultural relations are usually led by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the field of research, including on culture in external relations, the government

¹ 'Le trésor culturel du Bélarus', *Ambassade de la République du Belarus en France*. Online. Available at: <http://france.mfa.gov.by/fr/belarus/culture/>.

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus website: <http://www.mfa.gov.by/>.

³ *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, Paris, 20 October 2005, UNESCO. Online. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/eri/la/convention.asp?order=alpha&language=E&KO=31038>; and *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, Paris, 17 October 2003, UNESCO. Online. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/eri/la/convention.asp?order=alpha&language=E&KO=17116>.

The term 'approval' means that the state accepts to be bound by the convention. The instrument of approval or acceptance has the same effects as the ratification. See:

https://treaties.un.org/pages/Overview.aspx?path=overview/glossary/page1_en.xml&clang=en.

⁴ Information gathered from the website of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Accessed on 27 May 2013.

⁵ Responses to the Preparatory Action questionnaire by the Ministry of Culture, December 2013.

⁶ Data collected by a cultural expert in Belarus interviewed by Skype, July 2014.

⁷ Example given by the Ministry of Culture in the questionnaire: 'Brest Regional Executive Committee'. Online. Available at: <http://brest-region.gov.by/index.php/en/>.

works with a state-funded research institute, the Belarus Culture Institute.⁸ The President of the Republic may also be personally involved in some external cultural relations initiatives. For instance, the President of Belarus awarded a national prize for cinema to the film director Emir Kusturica in 2010.

A number of internationalised cultural events take place in Belarus in the field of the performing arts. The first Independent International Festival of Experimental Theatres was launched in 2011 and organised by the ROND Theatre, the Belarusian State Academy of Arts, the Centre of Belarusian Drama and Direction, and the concert agency Bopromo in cooperation with the Bonn municipality. Cinema festivals such as Niepakalianava and Listapad also cooperate with European partners.⁹ The Magnificat International Catholic Festival of Christian Films and TV Documentaries has been held in Belarus since the early 2000s by the Catholic Church of Belarus.¹⁰

Experts underline that there are three types of cultural organisations in Belarus: cooperating, compromising and non-cooperating with state authorities.¹¹ The cultural sector debates the country's cultural orientation and the European-ness of society. However, 'people who speak Belarusian are invariably treated as an opposition'.¹² The 'Let us be Belarusians/Budzma' campaign focuses on the recognition of the national/cultural identity of Belarusian. It works with Belarusian Diaspora abroad and with Belarusians in the country.¹³ Batskauschyna (the World Association of Belarusians) also promotes culture as a way to improve day-to-day life while referring to the roots of Belarusian identity.

Belarus is part of the Culture programme of the Eastern Partnership of the EU. It also has cooperation agreements with a number of EU Member States, namely: Latvia, Germany, Italy, France and Bulgaria.¹⁴ The EU has increased its assistance to Belarusian civil society in the last few years through a variety of programmes (EIDHR, Media). However, the country is not part of several international culture and education frameworks, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the EU Bologna Process or the European Parliament and Council of Europe's criteria of evaluation of the quality of education.¹⁵

The pariah status of Belarus makes it difficult for the EU and European organisations to engage with counterparts there. Amongst EU Member States, Poland, Lithuania and Germany are probably the most active in fostering cultural relations with Belarus via people-to-people contacts

⁸ The Institute of Culture of Belarus website: <http://inbelkult.by/en/>.

⁹ Lavon Barshcheuski, L., et al., *A Report on the Condition of NGOs and Independent Culture in Belarus*, Kultura Enter, 2011.

¹⁰ Magnificat. International Catholic Festival of Christian Documentary and TV Programs website: <http://signis.by/2014/en/meetings-festival>.

¹¹ Lavon Barshcheuski, L., op. cit., p.186.

¹² Ibid., p.19.

¹³ The video of the campaign is available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovrcsi5ukDI>.

¹⁴ These countries are mentioned on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' website, under the keyword 'culture'.

¹⁵ Lavon Barshcheuski, L., op. cit.

and, when possible, cross-border projects.¹⁶ Vilnius hosts the exiled Belarus University (1,800 students), and German festivals (e.g. Dach festival) or cultural institutions (e.g. City of Bonn) have cooperated with Belarusian artists and cultural professionals.

¹⁶ Reported Polish initiatives in Lublin and Bialystok (Belarusian rock festival of Basowiczca, see website: <http://www.basowiczca.org/>), work of late writer Sokrat Janowych. Lavon Barshcheuski, L., op. cit.

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Opinion surveys in the mid-2000s already revealed three main trends in the population's cultural perceptions and expectations regarding Europe and the EU: 1) a fragmented cultural identity threatening the existence of the country itself and encouraging the nationalistic behaviour of politicians; 2) the feeling of being remote from the European Union and its values; and 3) the recognition that the EU, despite its rhetoric focusing on the attractiveness of its values, actually has little power of attraction on the population in the country.¹⁷ 2012 surveys indicated that 78 per cent of the population felt primarily Belarusians, while more than a third thought they are 'Soviet' and only 24 per cent considered themselves as Europeans.¹⁸ This data is of concern to those cultural experts who feel that the European identity of Belarus is at risk.

In this context, a number of expectations have been expressed by cultural professionals working in and with Belarus. The first relates to the need for upgrading the skills and tools of cultural managers and professionals in the public and non-government sector through training and exchanges with foreign cultural experts.¹⁹ Interviewees stated this is needed in numerous fields such as heritage preservation, agro-tourism, museums management, filmmaking, communication and networking strategies in the field of cultural management. The second priority, albeit a sensitive political issue, is the need to promote the support to translation from and into Belarusian language.²⁰ According to a 2012 poll the part of the population mastering Belarusian language is quickly decreasing (40 per cent of respondents considered they know Belarusian language, against 51 per cent in 2009).²¹

Other comments made by informants touch upon hindrances to the freedom of association or access to state media, which make it difficult for cultural practitioners to work efficiently.²² There is need for 'platforms where people will discuss contemporary art trends', 'experimental theatres and artistic labs' and the transfer of know-how on cultural management of independent projects.²³ While Western European narratives tend to systematically merge Belarusian cultural issues with

¹⁷ S. White, J. Korosteleva, 'Wider Europe? The view from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 46, Issue 2, 2008, pp.219-241.

I. Klinke, 'The European Union's strategic non-engagement in Belarus challenging the hegemonic notion of the EU as a toothless value diffuser', *Perspectives*, Issue 27, 2006-2007, pp.25-43.

¹⁸ Data provided by the Kudzma Belarusians campaign using the results of a 2012 Novak Laboratory survey. Document in possession of the author.

¹⁹ Skype interview with a Belarusian cultural professional based in Minsk, July 2014.

²⁰ Email and skype exchanges with cultural experts, July 2014. The Polish Idea Bank sponsors a literature competition in Belarusian language: <http://en.eurobelarus.info/news/society/2014/06/04/ihar-babkou-won-jerzy-giedroyc-prize.html>

²¹ Data provided by the Kudzma Belarusians campaign using the results of a 2012 Novak Laboratory survey. Document in possession of the author.

²² The International Labour Association has issued a number of criticisms in that regard. 'Belarus Risks Becoming Only State Stripped Of EU Trade Preferences', *Belarus Digest*, 14 February 2013. Online. Available at: <http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-risks-become-only-state-stripped-eu-trade-preferences-12979>. The wish to have more access to state media was expressed by an independent cultural professional in an interview in July 2014.

²³ L. Lavon Barshcheuski, op. cit.

human rights-related dynamics, some experts call for a clearer distinction to be made between European cooperation in the cultural field and political relations with the regime. Recent reports by European experts also recommend more support to cultural exchanges despite political tensions with the authorities.²⁴

²⁴ Terry Sandell et al., *Analytical Baseline Report on the Culture Sector and Cultural Policy of the Republic of Belarus*, Regional Monitoring and Capacity Building Unit of the Eastern Partnership Culture Programme (RMCBU), January 2013.

ANNEX

EU-Belarus cultural cooperation activities run by the Commission Headquarters

- ‘Kyiv Initiative’: brings actors from local authorities and culture in ten small to middle range historic towns from each EaP country together:
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/cooperation/Kyiv/default_en.asp

The Kyiv Initiative brings together five countries at the south-eastern edge of Europe, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Their aim is to work with each other, to create democratic and engaged societies and rebuild trust and confidence across the region.

The programme focuses on five themes that both unite and characterise the participating countries – heritage management, film, the shaping of cultural policy, literature, wine culture and tourism exchange. Through a series of projects designed to encourage cross-border collaboration, the Kyiv Initiative enables the sharing of expertise and the development of competence and skills in both towns and the countryside.

In the context of the Council of Europe’s Kyiv Initiative Regional Programme, the European Commission is co-financing over the period 2009/2010 the first phase of Pilot Project 2 on ‘**Rehabilitation of Cultural Heritage in Historic Cities**’ (PP2) for institutional capacity-building in relation to rehabilitation projects. A second convention will be concluded between the Commission and the Council of Europe in 2010, valid until 2011, for the second phase of Pilot Project 2.

Eastern Partnership Culture Programme Part I

Programmes managed by HQ in Brussels

Strengthens regional cultural links and dialogue within the ENP East region, and between the EU and ENP Eastern countries' cultural networks and actors

Objectives:

It aims at assisting the Partner Countries in their cultural policy reform at government level, as well as capacity building and improving professionalism of cultural operators in the Eastern ENP region. It contributes to exchange of information and experience among cultural operators at a regional level and with the EU. The programme seeks to support regional initiatives which demonstrate positive cultural contributions to economic development, social inclusion, conflict resolution and intercultural dialogue (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus).

What does it do?

The programme helps strengthen policy-making, project and resource generating capacities of both the public sector and cultural operators. It fosters dialogue and contributes to the development of co-operation mechanisms within the sector across the region.

It also promotes intra-regional and inter-regional (EU-ENP) cultural initiatives and partnerships while helping to strengthen management skills and networking capacities of the cultural organisations and operators. The programme furthers linkages between cultural activities and wider regional agendas ranging from employment creation to social inclusion, environmental conservation, conflict prevention/resolution and intercultural dialogue.

Actions in brief: 1) Provides technical assistance to the Ministries of Culture in their policy reforms and helps overhaul legal and regulatory framework to foster cultural sector modernisation; 2) Organises training to address the identified skills shortages in the cultural sector; 3) Facilitates the increase of public access to cultural resources; 4) Supports conservation and valorisation of regional cultural resources and heritage; 5) Encourages multi-disciplinary and cross-sector exchanges between government, civil society and the private sector; 6) Helps cultivate cultural operators in the region through support in developing strategic management, business planning, communications, advocacy, fundraising and other relevant capacities.

Budget: 3 million €

Duration: April 2011-2013

Eastern Partnership Culture Programme Part II

Decision 2010/021-920

(Six projects were de-concentrated to the EUD in Georgia)

The second part of the Eastern Partnership Culture Programme has been approved, as one of a number of new regional programmes approved on 26 July 2010 by the European Commission, under the ENPI Regional East Action Programme 2010.

This Eastern Partnership Culture Programme will provide both *technical assistance*, to address specific priority needs of public institutions and the region's cultural sector, and *grants* to civil society cultural organisations – profit and non-profit – and national and local institutions for regional cooperation projects. The Programme will encompass the entire cultural sector, including cinema and the audiovisual sector, contemporary arts, tangible and intangible heritage, as well as support to heritage conservation projects.

The programme will help civil society organisations, both profit and non-profit, and government institutions at the national and local level to: 1) Strengthen regional links and dialogue within the region of the Eastern Partnership, and between the EU and countries of the Eastern Partnership in respect to cultural networks and actors; 2) Support policy reform and modernization of the cultural sectors in the Eastern Partnership region with the aim of promoting the role of culture in national agendas for development; 3) Support awareness raising and cultural initiatives having a regional impact on sustainable economic and social development, democratization, and enhanced intercultural dialogue.

Budget: 9 million €

Duration: 2010-2013

Name	Brief Description/Overall Objectives	EU Funding / Duration	Contact
SAY CHEESE: Eastern Family Album. Capacity Building, Networking and Promotion of Thematic Eastern Partnership	<i>Overall objective:</i> To enhance development of the so-called thematic Eastern Partnership photography (photography that demonstrates Eastern Partnership countries from various angles, such as culture, people, way of life, nature, cities and regions, business development, tourism opportunities, etc.) in the Eastern Partnership region and to contribute to the creation of the positive image of Eastern Partnership within the region and beyond it.	Duration 30 months	INTERAKCIA Local Foundation for Promotion of International Dialogue and Cooperation (Lead Project Partner) Olshevskogo st. 1b-88, Minsk, 220073 Belarus

Photography	<p><i>Specific objectives:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to enhance capacities of EaP photographers' associations and to encourage their networking with each other; 2. to enhance capacities and abilities of local professional and amateur photographers in the EaP region to create and sell high quality thematic EaP photos; 3. to promote thematic EaP photography on the EaP, EU and international level. 		<p>Contact person Mr. Ivan Shchadranok, Project Manager Tel./Fax: +375 (0) 17 256 99 01 E-mail: shchadranok@eu-belarus.net</p>
Sustainable Development of Local Communities Through the Actualisation of the Cultural Heritage	<p><i>Goal:</i> Strengthening culture sector of Ukraine and Belarus through the rehabilitation and preservation of ethno-cultural heritage of Polissya region.</p> <p><i>Objectives:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of cooperation between Ukraine and Belarus for Polissya culture preservation. • Increasing the efficiency of DNCKSTK through improving its material and technical potential. • Creation of the network of NGOs, and public authorities for better cooperation in Polissya culture preservation. • Promotion of Polissya culture in wider society. <p><i>Milestones/Results:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study on current state of the culture sphere of Polissya region; • Historic culture and ethnography expeditions; • Archaeological surveys of culture monuments in Polissya region – the zone of Chernobyl disaster; • Repair and renovation of the DNCKSTK premises; • Materials and technical logistic support to the exhibition of cultural artifacts of Polissya region; • Traveling exhibition to Polissya region; • Culture tourism routes development; • Training seminars on culture promotion and engagement of local citizens to culture development; • Public hearings on the results of the study; • Info materials development and publication; 	<p>Duration 36 months</p>	<p>Contact details Maryna Sadova, Project Manager Tel: +38 044 253 23 53 e-mail: fip@fip.org.ua</p>

- a documentary film development.

Special Action 2009-Culture Programme

Objectives:

Support cultural cooperation projects aimed at cultural exchanges between the countries taking part in the Programme and *Third Countries*, which have concluded association or cooperation agreements with the EU, provided that the latter contain cultural clauses. Every year one or more *Third Country(ies)* is/are selected for that particular year. The action must generate a concrete international cooperation dimension.

For the special action in 2009, the European Commission proposes to concentrate on the EU Neighbourhood and the eligible third countries are: Armenia, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Moldova, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Tunisia.

Duration: 2009-2010

Budget per project: 50,000-200,000 €

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/funding/2009/call_strand_13_2009_en.php

Name	Brief Description/Overall Objectives	EU Funding / Duration	Contact
Puppet nomad academy	<p>Inspired by ‘the nomads of beauty’ from the period of European avant-garde, we conceived this project as some kind of puppet workshops travelling from Armenia, across Belarus, Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia and up to Belgium.</p> <p>The idea is to connect the great masters of puppetry, coming from a rich tradition of Eastern-European puppetry – with the masters from Slovenia, Croatia and Belgium, and also with young puppeteers from all above countries. Our project found inspiration in the antique and in the old European tradition where masters teachers practically transferred their secrets, their knowledge and skills to students and younger artist.</p>	137,670.00 €	www.miniteater.si/client/en/index.php?table=articles&ID=1302

Special Action 2010-Culture Programme

Objectives:

The special action in 2010 is open for EU Neighbourhood countries which have concluded association or cooperation agreements with the Community and ratified the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

The eligible third countries are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Moldova, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Tunisia and Ukraine.

Azerbaijan and Ukraine have been added as from the first of March as they have signed the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Duration: 2010-2011

Budget per project: 50,000-200,000 €

http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/funding/2010/call_strand_13_2010_en.php

Name	Brief Description/Overall Objectives	EU Funding / Duration	Contact
Mirrors of Europe	Mirrors of Europe will provide opportunities for prominent authors from 20 selected countries to spend time in another project country and produce an extended essay on his/her experience and perception of the host country. Each project country would host one foreign author and send one of its own authors to one of the remaining countries. In the essays, the authors will be expected to address the question of what they see as the key signs of Europe in the country they are visiting. The idea is that essays written by foreign authors will allow the domestic readership to see their countries through a different lens.	162,000.00 €	http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/funding/2010/selection/documents/strand_1_3_5/strand13-publicationprojectsselected.pdf
LPM – Live Performers Meeting (IX - X - XI Edition)	<p>LEAD PARTNER FLYER COMMUNICATION SRL Via Cardinal De Luca ,10; IT 00196 Roma www.flyer.it</p> <p>PARTNERS FROM EUROPEAN COUNTRIES *Association Les Reseaux De la Creation, FR; *Jelenlét Kulturális Közhazsnú Egyesület, HU</p> <p>PARTNER(S) FROM 3RD COUNTRY "Галерея арт-Подземка", "Ў" галерэя сучаснага мастацтва, BY</p>	170,000.00 €	N.A
Show Europe – Show Belarus! Enabling Artistic Exchanges between Estonia, Sweden, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal and Belarus	<p>Within the framework of the first stage five of 'Show Europe-Show Belarus!' different groups of Belarusian cultural actors will go to the five EU member countries. Each of the five tours will last for three days and will include a set of cultural events open to the general public in the visited country.</p> <p>The tour programme will consist of one music performance, one artistic exhibition, one photo exhibition, a panel discussion on music-related issues, a panel discussion on visual arts, master classes and informal communication between participating artists to share experience, exchange ideas and discuss potential for further collaboration.</p>	190,295.00 €	http://showbelarus.eu/node/13