



preparatory action CULTURE *in* EU EXTERNAL RELATIONS



Press Release

European Union needs a ‘soft power’ strategy

Experts recommend joint approach with EU institutions and civil society based on the values of reciprocity, mutuality and shared responsibility

Brussels, 7 April 2014 – A consortium of independent experts and eight cultural institutes and organisations, supporting the [Preparatory Action “Culture in EU External Relations”](#), has found that the European Union needs to define a cultural relations – or ‘soft power’ – strategy, so that Europe can maximise its influence and attraction in the rest of the world.

The conclusion was reached following a mapping of existing resources, approaches and strategies regarding culture in external relations in Member States, and the findings of a more in-depth consultation in 26 non-EU countries. Both of these exercises, and the work of the Preparatory Action more broadly, aim to facilitate and support an on-going process of research, exchange of knowledge and public debate about the role of culture in the EU’s external relations.

The principle finding is that culture can play a decisive role in the development of external relations and that cultural relations has huge potential for enhancing European ‘soft power’ around the world, as well as for enhancing awareness of other cultures and the capacity to learn from them in Europe. Other key findings are available in the [Discussion Paper](#) that will be distributed at an [International Conference](#) to be held in Brussels on 7-8 April, 2014.

“We need culture in European diplomacy, but at the same time culture needs free spaces and encounters on an equal footing to flourish. We have good experience with the ‘arm’s length’ principle in organising cultural and educational programmes,” said Johannes Ebert, Secretary-General of the Goethe-Institut, a consortium member.

There is great demand, in Europe as well as elsewhere, for more and better European cultural relations with the rest of the world that can also deliver greater prosperity and human development for all. However, the European Union currently lacks a comprehensive strategy for cultural relations.

The consortium recommends that any future strategy must recognise that people outside the European Union want Europe to engage in a new way, sharing and listening together, rather than simply projecting individual national cultures. Any future strategy also must respond better to the cultural interests and practices of young people.

Lead expert for the consortium, Prof. Yudhishtir Raj Isar, stated, “EU institutions, national cultural relations agencies and cultural civil society need to work together to build a ‘joined up’ international cultural relations strategy based on the values of reciprocity, mutuality and shared responsibility in a spirit of global cultural citizenship. Such a strategy requires political will, an enabling framework and commitment. It also has to be adequately funded under the European Union’s budget and implemented mainly by cultural professionals.”

A series of prototypes and pilot-projects should be launched forthwith in order to kick start and inform the strategy. The projects selected should also trigger a process of transformative change in the way Europe’s international cultural relations are conceived and carried out.

The Preparatory Action's draft findings and recommendations will be discussed during the [International Conference](#) to be opened today by Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth, Pierre Vimont, Executive Secretary General of the European External Action Service (EEAS), and Morten Løkkegaard MEP, Vice-President of the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament. The conference will bring together artists, cultural operators, academics, NGO representatives and high level policy makers to debate the consortium's findings and advise the Commission and other relevant EU institutions on effective follow up to the recommendations of the Preparatory Action.

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Editor's Notes

About the Preparatory Action "Culture in EU External Relations"

The Preparatory Action "Culture in EU External Relations" is an initiative funded by the European Union. It was initiated by the European Parliament and is implemented by the European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture, with the support of a Consortium of independent experts (Yudhishthir Raj Isar, Rod Fisher, Damien Helly and Gottfried Wagner) and eight cultural institutes and organisations ([Goethe-Institut](#), [BOZAR](#), [British Council](#), [Danish Cultural Institute](#), [ECF European Cultural Foundation](#), [IFA Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen](#), [Institut français](#) and [KEA European Affairs](#)).

The overall objective of this initiative is to support on-going policy reflection at EU level on how to strengthen and further develop culture in EU external relations. More specifically, it was designed to lead to the formulation of recommendations on how culture can be better and more strategically used in the EU's external relations.

More information about this initiative can be found at: www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu



Consortium leader



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An initiative funded by the European Union

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