

The EL-CSID project is coordinated by the Institute for European Studies (IES)



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 693799.

# Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations: An Initial, Critical but Constructive Analysis

Richard Higgott and Luk Van Langenhove

Issue 2016/1 • September 2016

## Introduction

The EU has recently produced a strategy paper for cultural diplomacy (*Towards an EU Strategy of international cultural relations*).<sup>1</sup> This was delivered in the form of a joint communication to the EP and the Council, issued by the Federica Mogherini the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on June 8, 2016<sup>2</sup>. This was two weeks before the UK voted to leave the EU and just shy of three weeks before the High Representative also delivered *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe* being the *Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy*.<sup>3</sup> Timing of the cultural relations strategy paper was thus, to say the least, less than propitious. The other two events do and will cast massive shadows over it.

In this short note we offer an early assessment of the international cultural relations strategy. We do so initially by taking it on its own terms. Obviously it is still too early to assess the impact of that strategy so its initial aspirations and intentions are scrutinized. But we cannot leave it at that; thus the second half of this note locates it in the wider context of the tough temper of the times we live in, the appearance of the bigger *Global Strategy* paper and the Brexit referendum vote. The note is critical, but we hope constructively and sympathetically so. The search for such a strategy in its own right is to be commended. The key question is the degree to which the prospects for its implementation are realisable within the context of the constraints we outline.

## PART 1

### 1.1 The shaping of an EU strategy for culture

Article 6 of the TFEU states that the EU has a supporting competence in culture. This is further defined in paragraph 3 of article 167. It states that the EU and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries. Paragraph 4 of that same article provides that the Union shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of the Treaties. In line with these competencies, the European Commission

---

<sup>1</sup> The Strategy prefers the expression 'international inter-cultural relations'. In this note we use this expression interchangeably with the notion of 'cultural diplomacy'.

<sup>2</sup> JOIN(2016)29final

<sup>3</sup> [http://eeas.europa.eu/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf)

proposed in 2007 to promote culture in the EU's international relations<sup>4</sup>.

Member States, civil society representatives and the EP have on several occasions called for a more coordinated approach to the EU's international cultural relations. In February 2014, a cultural advisor to the Secretary's Office of the EEAS was appointed. In the words of the High Representative: *'...culture has to be at the core of our foreign policy... We should not be afraid to say we are a cultural superpower.'*<sup>5</sup>

An important step towards this cultural relations strategy was the 2014 EP Preparatory Action paper *Culture in EU external relations*.<sup>6</sup> This document on the role of culture in the EU's external relations (EU, 2014: 8) stressed the growing salience for the EU of mutual learning and mutual sharing in what it calls 'global cultural citizenship'. The Report recognised the increasing role of private sector actors, notably philanthropic organisations, corporate sponsors and private higher education providers, and cultural relations offering '... huge potential for enhancing European influence and attraction' (EU, 2014: 9). Culture, says the document '... has entered the heart of international relations thinking as a major public policy issue' (EU, 2014: 18). During this period the EEAS was also becoming much more aware and forward leaning, albeit primarily rhetorically at this stage, in the utility it sees for the role of culture in EU foreign policy.

In March 2015, the main conclusions of the *Preparatory Action* were presented at the European Parliament. On that occasion, MEP's expressed the need to tighten the links between culture and diplomacy and to do this at the EU level in order to maximize the effectiveness of the action.<sup>7</sup> In November 2015, the Council called on the Commission to prepare a 'strategic approach to culture in the EU's external relations, outlining for this purpose a set of guiding principles'<sup>8</sup>. The present Joint Communication is the answer to that call. But if the *Strategy on International Cultural Relations* is the product of that demand it must be seen only as part of the wider attention and energy that has gone into the creation of a new strategy for the EU's external relations. As we suggest in part 2 however, international cultural relations, while present, would not appear to be at the centre of the new *Global Strategy*.

---

<sup>4</sup> Communication on 'European Agenda for Culture in a globalising world' COM(2007) 477 final.

<sup>5</sup> <https://amp.twimg.com/v/dae668ff-969b-4776-9d1a-c0ac3aedc3c5>

<sup>6</sup> <http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu>

<sup>7</sup> Press release of the Joint Meeting at the European Parliament on Culture in the EU External Relations held on 23 March 2015 in Brussels. <http://>

<sup>8</sup> Outcome of 3428th Council Meeting: Education, Youth, Culture and Sport, 23-4 November 2015.

## 1.2 Core elements of the strategy paper on international cultural relations

The Joint Communication proposes a strategy for the EU's International Cultural Relations organized around three objectives that together aim at "making the EU a stronger global actor" (p. 3):

- Supporting culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development;
- Promoting culture and inter-cultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations;
- Reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage.

Moreover, the Joint Communication identifies a number of "principles" that should "guide" EU actions in the field of international cultural relations:

- Promoting cultural diversity and respect for human rights;
- Fostering mutual respect and inter-cultural dialogue;
- Ensuring respect for complementarity and subsidiarity;
- Encouraging a cross-cutting approach to culture;
- Promoting culture through existing frameworks for cooperation.

Within its three core work streams, the document lists a number of priorities and instruments, most of them already existing. Examples are the co-funding of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the support to European SMEs, the training for observers of election observation missions, the enhanced cooperation with Cultural Institutes and so on. Nothing is said about budgets, nor how all of this will be coordinated at EU level. The Joint Communication ends with some grand aspirations. All of this will, it asserts, "*strengthen the protection and promotion of cultural heritage, stimulate inter-cultural dialogue and peace-building, support cultural production and tourism as drivers of development and economic growth, and use education, research and science as agents for dialogue and exchanges*" (pp. 15-16). Interestingly however, the document is virtually silent on the role of educational relations as a core transmission belt for developing these activities.

It should be noted here that the strategy is in effect a 'wrap up strategy'; that is one that gives structure and substance to the strategy by embracing '...existing cooperation frameworks and financing instruments'. Put less diplomatically, the newness of the strategy is the manner in

which it brings an original, or at least new, coordinating spin to existing activities; preferably for no extra cost to the existing programmes. This is not to imply that the strategy is all spin. There are already in place some fairly substantial cooperative frameworks that offer ways to enhance the EU's international cultural relations—notably (i) the 'Partnership Instruments' with their priority on public diplomacy and people to people exchanges promoting the Union's values and interests; (ii) the Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EUDHR) to support democracy consolidation, the rule of law and respect for human rights; (iii) the Global Public Goods and Challenges Programme in the domain of development; (iv) the Instrument for Stability and Peace and (iv) the Creative Europe Programme promoting cultural heritage and the creative sectors. But as we suggest in the next section the issue is not their utility but rather the way that they might or might not act as agents of cultural enhancing external relations.

## Part 2

### 2.1. An initial assessment of the Joint Communication

So, the good news is that there is now a strategic vision that outlines the EU's ambitions and point to some strategic priorities and to some tools and mechanisms that will be deployed to enhance international intercultural relations. Needless to say that such a Strategy will inevitably be open to critique; some elements of which are addressed below.

**(i) *The ambition to be a strong global actor:*** The Joint Communication explicitly frames EU cultural diplomacy in the context of the EU's aspiration of being a global actor. This is remarkable. Europe is surely, by any imagination, a global actor if not, as Mogherini rather injudiciously notes, a 'cultural superpower'. Standard data measurements; size and population, GDP as a share of global total, share of global trade (in manufactures and especially services), technological innovation, percentage of patents held, military capability etc. all attest to its status as a global actor of consequence.

But it is a global actor beset by a wider crisis of confidence and identity that engulfs it at a time of its diminished global expectations when compared with the assertiveness of less than a decade ago. In its growing interest in cultural diplomacy Europe seems to be searching to rebuild

some of the aspiration and optimism that prevailed in the early 2000s when it saw itself approaching par with the USA and emerging Asia (notably China) and as the third pillar of a multi-polar, specifically, tri-polar world. One assumption underpinning the growing interest in cultural (and science) diplomacy is that it can contribute to building European global status. This is only a quasi-rational assertion; things have moved on since the heady optimistic days of the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The assumption that EU cultural diplomacy is of sufficient breadth and depth to staunch or at least mitigate its declining influence vis-a-vis the traditional hegemon, the USA, and the rising global force of East Asia, and China in particular, is pietistic rather than scientific.

In the face of these challenges, making the best of assets such as Europe's culture can become crucial instruments of policy to be harnessed and enhanced when and wherever possible is rational. But a sense of perspective is needed. And indeed, articulating and harnessing the strength of Europe's cultural heritage to positive diplomatic ends take on an importance way beyond initial assumptions. Specifically, leveraging cultural and also science diplomacy to build both bi-lateral and multi-actor relationships as well as informal and formal global networks as a source of power and a policy tool takes on much greater importance in the contemporary era than in the more optimistic times of a decade ago (see EU, 2014a: 21).

But exercises in cultural diplomacy, either EU led or member state led, are always going to be difficult in the contemporary era. Target audiences, especially in parts of the Middle East and the developing world can, and often do, treat cultural diplomacy with suspicion. At worst it is seen as a post-imperial/colonial legacy. At best it is a manifestation of a residual assumption of Western superiority—hence our reference to Mogherini's assertion that Europe is a cultural superpower as injudicious. 'Superpower' is not a notion that lends itself to the improvement of international inter-cultural relations.

At the heart of 'Western' culture we may find a set of substantive, shared values—including commitments to a market economy, some kind of 'liberal' democracy, religious tolerance and a free press that we would wish for others to receive, appreciate and eventually accept. The problem however is less with the virtue of these values but that we invariably disagree about the norms-as-practices that will ensure their delivery. We cannot be, or rather we should not be, certain that these values amount

to a common 'European cultural persona', space of meaning or set of normative practices that automatically, or even easily, transcend national boundaries? Can they be the basis for the development of a common cultural identity and by extension a more joined up cultural diplomacy? To suggest they can, as some of the more assertive brands of European normative power do, is at best courageous (read foolhardy), at worst ethnocentrically arrogant. If Europe is to be successful in its quest for enhanced international cultural relations it must be nuanced, constrained, coordinated and modest even.

That there may be a *core* of support for such generic values in Europe is not the same as *universal* support for them; especially amongst the increasingly socio-culturally diverse communities of the EU. Similarly, attempting to consolidate a European understanding of its own common core values is again one thing while trying to universalize them through cultural diplomacy to other parts of the world, even if only implicitly, is entirely different. If its message to peoples and states beyond the borders of the EU is that European values—either exclusively, or as a subs-set of trans-Atlantic values—are pivotal to the smooth functioning of international society in the modern era it is a message that is probably destined to fall on deaf ears.

Of course, Europe needs some consensus around its own values. But a battle over values—implying or simply asking if there are any universal values—is proving disruptive both within and beyond its borders and is arguably counter-productive at this difficult time in the history of the EU. It is asking too much of those European norms and values developed since the Enlightenment—and especially a crusading desire to export democratic values—to expect that they should be universalisable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And while the Mogherini strategy argues it is aimed at promoting *diversity*, an alternative reading, and the one most likely to be taken beyond the borders of the EU, is that its real aim is to promote the EU vis-a-vis the influences of the other great players in the contemporary global search for influence—the USA and China. While there is nothing inherently wrong with such a strategy, the EU needs to tread very softly with third countries if it is not to generate a backlash against its cultural diplomacy.

In arguing that European values are not universalisable we are not advocating cultural relativism. Understanding societies within their own framework is important but, as anthropologists tell us, it does not mean



'anything goes'. At the very least, demands of human dignity and the in-principle sanctity of life should remain non-negotiable and their violation resisted and condemned as the EU has properly done since the failed coup attempt in Turkey. Similarly, as we have seen with the rise of ISIS, its affiliates and their barbarous activities, there are groups of actors for whom no amount of cultural latitude would be sufficient and should not be given.

Disagreements with extra-European partners over issues of values will from time to time inevitably lead to the suspension of cultural dialogues. How to sustain (or occasionally re-instate) such dialogues and provide space for diversity of expression both internal and external to the Union, but without lapsing into cultural relativism, are central philosophical and conceptual issues of our time. They are also issues that cast massive policy shadows over the practice of international cultural relations in the early 21st century in general and EU cultural diplomacy in particular. While such a theoretically discursive analysis of this kind was clearly not appropriate for inclusion in the Joint Communication, those tasked with implementing the strategy must be aware that no strategy for international cultural engagement will be successful without understanding and responding accordingly to these concerns.

**(ii) *The emphasis on dialogue:*** The Joint Communication focuses attention on cultural dialogue between the EU and the rest of the world. This is a welcome approach that moves the EU strategy, in theory at least beyond the old fashioned diplomatic interest in culture almost purely as an instrument for national promotion. But, this need not inevitably be the case in practice. Cultural activity and organisation long ago escaped the boundaries of the state. Cultural dialogue and cultural exchange are serious elements of the contemporary transnational and trans-continental conversations. But the globalisation of cultural industries, especially music, cinema and art, is also influenced by the technological revolutions that shape today's digital age. This is a crucial factor not identified in the Strategy.

In any understanding of culture, the manner in which language is changing in the digital age, especially with the increasing use of social media, is having a paradoxical effect. We might see and *know* more about the cultures of others, but it does not necessarily follow that we are better at *understanding* them. Knowing and understanding are two different things. Indeed, some media, especially visual images taken out of



context, can distort understanding and make it potentially conflict generating. Similarly, the availability of access to different cultural artefacts, does not necessarily imply a growth of mutual understanding. For that to happen they must be accompanied by dialogue. Indeed, dialogue, not simply dissemination, is the important act.

But any dialogue, by its very nature, faces constraints. First, assertions of the need for dialogue presupposes divisions and tensions. The most important dialogues are often between those holding extreme positions on a given issue when often these are precisely the wrong interlocutors for the strengthening of inter-cultural co-operation. Indeed such a structured context for dialogue can deepen divisions by highlighting differences between societies, cultures and belief systems. Second, as individuals we carry multiple and complementary identities that sustain our multifaceted personae. People can choose at any time what kind of group membership they want to put forward. Identity needs to be an element of choice. But by seeking to define 'who we are' through particular cultural identities, we risk narrowing our identities in a counter-productive manner. This is clearly the case across Europe at this moment. Cultural identity, real or invented, is an increasingly important tool in the armoury of Europe's new populist social movements and political parties. Cultural diplomacy must have as a first priority the containment and mitigation of such difference not its exacerbation.

Third, dialogue simply for its own sake is not enough. There needs to be a purpose to it. What this purpose might be is not sufficiently articulated in the Joint Communication. One purpose of EU driven dialogue could be the building of planetary partnerships between peoples facing common global challenges. Indeed, despite cultural differences between people, there is a shared identity across all humans faced by global challenges. The need to articulate a common 'human civilization' that celebrates the rich diversity of all cultures, counters a syndrome of fear that exploits diversity and the suppression of the beliefs of others as erroneous and evil. To articulate collective global humanity is done properly and cautiously could be a serious global agenda item in the contemporary era. As a rationale for enhancing international cultural relations it is exemplary. This of course easier said than done, but it is the natural step for governments, international organizations and civil society to take in the contemporary socio-cultural domain.

Such a dimension however seems to be lacking in the Joint Communication. If the EU wishes to go down this path the reality of global and regional interdependence should be compelling core actors in global society to recognize the common denominator in human civilization and make full use of this joint heritage. The rapid and dramatic evolution of interdependence in our world demands a new partnership. One suggestion therefore is that the international community, including the EU, should therefore move towards a platform of inter-cultural dialogue aimed at building a '**Partnership of Cultures**'.

But a final word of caution is needed. Cultural diplomacy, even with an emphasis on dialogue, can be a subjective and problematic tool at times; especially when mission is confused. As we have suggested, culture and norms are not the same thing. Culture, from its German origins meaning 'self-realization', reflects a society's historically determined, moral, religious and national beliefs. Norms, by contrast, influence the prescriptive practices of actors. While norms are indeed culturally determined, one culture does not set the course of action for another. Cultural dialogues are more often than not conversations about how norms as practice should work, not about the fundamental nature of cultural values. Moreover, norms are adaptive<sup>9</sup> and it is the evolving nature of them that makes cultural diplomacy a difficult and at times unpredictable instrument of external relations. On an initial reading the new Strategy is insufficiently sensitized to this consideration. If it is to have an impact on policy it will need to come to grips with this distinction between culture and norms and seek to articulate how norms as practice should be operationalized.

## 2.2. Four elephants in the room

We think there are four elephants in the room when it comes to having a full appreciation of the new strategy for international cultural relations. The EU is in the middle of that contemporary cliché 'the perfect storm'; a combination of:

- (i) The ongoing crises over refugees and immigration with all their attendant primary and secondary consequences.
- (ii) The fate of the Greek economy in particular and the direction of

---

<sup>9</sup> Crow, Alexis (2011) 'Cultural Dialogues in International Security: New Thinking for Europe and America,' *International Security Programme Policy Paper*, 6, London: Chatham House pps: 6-11

the Eurozone overall.

- (iii) The June 23 referendum decision by the UK to exit the European Union and what it might imply.
- (iv) What we might call the ever present 'coordination problem'.

Elephants (i) and (ii) are well understood and are not discussed here. (iii) and (iv) are discussed below; albeit in reverse order.

The EU's long-standing coordination problem is reflected in the ambiguity of The Joint Communication towards how EU actions relate to the separate strategies and actions of its Member States. What on the one hand we (many) call the coordination problem—Brussels aspiration to supplant the older notion of 'nation branding' at the state level with 'European branding' at the Community level. On the other hand Brussels acknowledgment that EU actions have to be complementary to what is organized at the level of its Member States. No suggestions are offered in the Strategy as to how to deal with this duality.

Sadly, the experiences of the past decade—especially with the global financial crisis, the continuing Euro zone crisis and its effects, the failed Arab revolutions, the Russian occupation of Crimea, intervention in eastern Ukraine, the birth of ISIS and the increasing problems associated with the growth in the number of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean—show that the EU's national governments still find it hard, and sometimes undesirable, to operate a common, Brussels coordinated, policy in the international domain. Initiatives that involve the recourse to traditional instruments of foreign policy in Europe's international relations, including forceful and coordinated diplomacy reflect, more often than not, divisions rather than agreement over policy; a condition invariably leading to sub-optimal policy outcomes.

The impact of the economic crisis, the changing patterns in the global distribution of economic and political power and increased skepticism towards the European project in the face of its numerous contemporary crises places contradictory demands on those who would make and implement a joined up EU approach to external relations. Demands for greater coherence and effectiveness in EU foreign policy, captured in the creation of the EEAS and in its supporter's desires for 'a European Diplomatic System' confront national desires to retain or, dare we say 'take back control' of policy. In this context, the opportunities and challenges, and the prospects for the success of, of enhanced

coordination in cultural diplomacy between the EU, its members and their extra-European partners takes on a public policy significance for collective European action not normally attributed to culture.

As a consequence, the degree to which the EEAS will play a major role in the development of a specifically European cultural (and science) diplomacy will depend upon two factors:

- (i) The degree to which cultural diplomacy, not traditionally at the core of foreign policy, is deemed to be central to a member state's diplomacy—and this will clearly differ from state to state and issue to issue.
- (ii) The degree to which states are prepared to 'outsource' policy from their foreign ministries to the EEAS.

While the Brussels rhetoric on enhancing European cultural relations is strong, the likelihood of it turning into concrete outcomes, especially within the major European states with their own strong individual traditions of cultural diplomacy, should not be overestimated. Brexit is clearly a relevant consideration here but in a manner as yet to be determined.

Notwithstanding that the British Labour Peer, Katherine Ashton, was the first High Representative for the EEAS, the UK since its inception has, as much as possible, kept its own foreign policy activity at arms length from the activities of the EEAS. William Hague, a recent UK Foreign Minister is on record as saying the UK would *never* outsource the promotion of their own interests to it. And Hague, it should be noted was not the only EU foreign minister of this mind. The French too have an equally strong nationalist position on the issue.<sup>10</sup> The UK does not see the EEAS as a policy coordinator rather than, at best, a potential policy 'amplifier' but even then one to be treated with ambivalence.<sup>11</sup>

The question therefore is whether the departure of the UK from the EU—perhaps the strongest opponent to a greater coordination role for the EEAS—might in fact, by its departure, diminish opposition to the accumulation of coordinating capabilities within the EEAS in general and particularly in the development of European international cultural

---

<sup>10</sup> Bátorá Jozef and Spence David (2015) (eds.) *The European External Action Service: European Diplomacy in Post Westphalia*, Basingstoke: Palgrave. P. 58.

<sup>11</sup> Fiott, Daniel (2015) 'Our Man in Brussels: The UK and the EEAS—Ambivalence and Influence, in Balfour, Rosa, Carta, Caterina and Raik, Kristi (eds.) *The European External Action Service and National Foreign Ministries: Convergence of Divergence*, Aldershot: Ashgate. p. 75

relations. As noted above, the answer will be determined by the importance attached to cultural relations in the member states and a willingness to outsource it to the EEAS. With the UK gone, the more instinctively 'coordinating'<sup>12</sup> voice of Germany will almost certainly grow.

But even while the rhetoric of stronger cultural relations might become stronger the practice of EU diplomacy might not find as much space for it as the new international cultural relations strategy might anticipate. Crowding out is always a possibility in a packed external relations agenda. Indeed, this might already be the case if we read the *Global Strategy* closely. Its document *Shared Vision, Common Action: a Stronger Europe* does indeed identify cultural diplomacy, along with economic diplomacy and energy diplomacy, as 'new fields of joined-up external action' (2016:49). But that is all it does—cultural diplomacy receives only one mention on one line in the paper. It would thus be stretching it to say that culture is at the core of the new *Global Strategy*, let alone in Mogherini's own words, '... at the core of our foreign policy'<sup>13</sup>. Time alone will tell on this score.

## Conclusion

Cultural Diplomacy has been conventionally described as the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation or promote national interests.<sup>14</sup> In such a view—one in which cultural activity is undertaken at the behest of and by government—cultural diplomacy becomes an arm of public diplomacy, whereby the target of diplomatic efforts is the general public, or sections thereof, in the partner state, rather than its government officials.

Cultural diplomacy by this definition is public diplomacy state-driven and in the service of the state. Again, using a popular cliché, it is an arm of a state's 'soft power' and it is traditionally understood as government-funded cultural interaction. Traditionally, cultural diplomacy is also linked to cultural products and practices; reflected in ways of life, social habits and labels that can serve as selling points for a country's culture. Often this comes with more or less stereotyped messages such as: reliability

---

<sup>12</sup> Adebahr, Cornelius (2015) 'Germany: The Instinctive Integrationist', in Balfour, Carta, and Raik, *op cit*.

<sup>13</sup> <https://amp.twimg.com/v/dae668ff-969b-4776-9d1a-c0ac3aedc3c5>

<sup>14</sup> Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 1999.

and craftsmanship in Germany, taste and fashion in Italy, music and theatre in the UK, cinema in the US, chocolate in Belgium. It is also about the management of relationship across civilisations and religious divides.

In this latter regard, cultural diplomacy is also an important element of public diplomacy especially when politico-ideological, influences come into play. Cultural diplomacy was, to coin a phrase from the past, about 'winning the hearts and minds of the people.' On this reading, the influence of culture as a way of life can be more influential than brute military power. Ways of life—represented by icons, habits, labels and especially social practices--can serve as selling points for a country's culture. After the Cold War, it was suggested that knowledge of western material culture and consumption patterns beamed through the Iron Curtain undermined the Soviet project as much as the nuclear arms race.<sup>15</sup>

If cultural diplomacy, facilitated by scientific innovation—radio and television—was important in reaching out to Soviet and Eastern European citizens in that historical period, the concept of cultural diplomacy nevertheless still carries with it connotations of 'western' superiority which do not play well in all parts of the world. It might now be much less so the case, but European states have a long tradition of letting other states know when they did not match up to its (European) 'standards' (not being modern or developed; not being secular or Christian; not being democratic). Europe has not been alone in this tradition of course. The USA too has a track record. But such activities from earlier times have left a long-standing, and in some instances still present, sense of resentment; especially in European post-colonial states. Foreign policy has been, and is, shaped accordingly. It has led at best to legacies of status deprivation and a sense of national shame through to the contemporary responses of alienated groups resorting, increasingly in some contexts, to acts of violence.

Cultural diplomacy needs continual 're-mapping' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to escape the simplicities and certainties of the Cold War era.<sup>16</sup> Re-mapping implies not only understanding what we mean by culture but also the language we use to promote it in the context of cultural diplomatic

---

<sup>15</sup> Skolnikoff, Eugene (1993) *The Elusive Transformation: Science, Technology and the Evolution of International Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 96-1-2

<sup>16</sup> Treverton, Gregory (2015) 'Foreword' in Eric Nemeth (ed.) *Cultural Security: Evaluating the Power of Culture in International Affairs*, New York: World Scientific, p. xi.



initiatives. Without re-mapping, legacies of resentment will remain. Contemporary understanding cannot ignore advances in communications and the growing activities of networks, non-governmental organisations and the social media.

Does the new EU strategy for international inter-cultural relations reflect the complex combination of these old and new meanings? Can it, and is it re-mapping sufficiently? Explicitly not, but implicitly perhaps yes. But we will not know until we see this strategy in action. Our critique, we hope, is not unsympathetic. Much thought has gone into the Joint Communication. A strategy for European cultural diplomacy is, as we detailed in the first half of the paper, *ipso facto* a good thing and long overdue. It has tried to grapple with some, if not all, of the key issues that we have identified. But the litmus test of the Strategy will be the degree to which it can be operationalized in the face of the wider pressures and constraints, both conceptual and empirical, that we identified in the second half of this paper.

### **Some Recommendations for Consideration**

Strategy papers invariably propose grand ambition and good intentions only to falter when reality bites. As we have suggested the new EU strategy on cultural relations might not be immune to this danger. This is not our hope. Thus, drawing on this policy paper, we propose several recommendations to the EEAS and to the Commission's other agencies dealing with cultural diplomacy to assist the translation of the Strategy into effective and efficient policy.

#### **Recommendation 1: Don't just talk the talk. Walk the Walk: Put Cultural Diplomacy at the heart of EU external policy**

There is a mismatch between the High Representative's issuing a strategy statement on cultural diplomacy only for it to be followed by its near absence in the *Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy*. This needs to be rectified. What is needed is a series of actions to integrate cultural diplomacy into EU Global Strategy.

#### **Recommendation 2: Allow the EEAS to take the lead coordinating role joining up Cultural strategy and Global Strategy**



### **Recommendation 3: Drop the language of Europe as a 'cultural superpower'.**

At best, it is open to misinterpretation. At worst, it can become a focal point for resentment amongst the target countries in which the EU wishes to enhance international cultural relations.

### **Recommendation 4: Identify some specific objectives in the pursuit of the EU international cultural relations.**

The 2014 *Preparatory Action* paved the way to writing the joint communication. Perhaps it is time to launch a similar 'consolidation action' to identify some specific objectives

### **Recommendation 5: Develop a two level strategy for cultural diplomacy**

Invite the Member States to differentiate between their own national agendas and a strategy they can agree on for Commission support external action in the development of its collective international cultural relations

### **Recommendation 6: Codify EU Unity in Diversity**

As a result of the past enlargement the EU is now a very diverse cultural entity. Perhaps it is time to think about a set of actions geared towards identifying the key elements of any collective cultural identity of the EU community itself with the aim of strengthening the 'unity in the diversity' of EU member States.

---

About the authors:

**Luk Van Langenhove** is a Research Professor at the Institute for European Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, and director of the United Nations University Institute for Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS). He is the Scientific Coordinator of the H2020 project EL-CSID.

T +32 2 614 80 15 - [lvlangen@vub.ac.be](mailto:lvlangen@vub.ac.be)

**Richard Higgott** is a Research Professor at the Institute for European Studies and Distinguished Professor of Diplomacy at Vesalius College. He is also Emeritus Professor of International Political Economy at the University of Warwick.

T +32 2 614 81 71 - [Richard.Higgott@vub.ac.be](mailto:Richard.Higgott@vub.ac.be)