

Shaping Soft Power - Cultural Relations as a Dimension of EU Foreign Policy

Presentation by Gijs de Vries at the conference of the Goethe Institute and the European Cultural Foundation under the auspices of the German Presidency of the EU

The Hague, Peace Palace, 9 March 2007

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Every day our lives are affected by culture and interpretations of cultural identity. Who we think we are affects how we think about others and how we behave towards them - whether in our local community, our country, or at international level. Culture matters intrinsically, as one of the conditions of a life fulfilled. In our globalising world, torn by ethnic and religious strife, culture also matters as a co-determinant of peace - and of conflict. At a time when extremists spread their message of hate and of the incompatibility of Islam with the universal values of liberty interpretations of cultural identity are at the very centre of international affairs.

Foreign policy is about the defence of our security and interests in the world. How countries are perceived by others is one of the factors affecting their influence in the world. This is why countries practice public diplomacy: the promotion of the national interest by informing, engaging, and influencing people around the world. Cultural diplomacy is a significant dimension of public diplomacy.

But foreign policy is about more than the defence of material interests, and about 'hard power'. It is also about 'soft power' and about the promotion of immaterial interests and values. In Europe these values form the essence of our composite European identity. Javier Solana has summarized them as follows: compassion with those who suffer; peace and reconciliation through integration; a strong attachment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law; a spirit of compromise, plus a commitment to promote in a pragmatic way a rules-based international system. Today these values are under threat, first and foremost from Islamist extremists. Promoting European values thus must be at the core of our common European foreign and security policy. Defending and promoting values is not only a responsibility of traditional diplomacy, at the government-to-government level. Relations with civil society through public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy have a critical part to play.

The importance of public diplomacy and of cultural relations has long been recognised by many European governments. It has not, as yet, been officially recognised by the European Union. In its relations with non-European countries the EU engages in cultural affairs; it does not so far operate a foreign cultural policy. It has been a good idea, therefore, of the organisers of today's conference to ask what role culture can play as a dimension of European foreign policy. Let us explore how cultural policy could contribute to the EU's 'soft power', in defence of its values of tolerance and liberty.

Before we embark on this journey it may be useful to define our terms. What do we mean when we speak of culture, or cultural diplomacy?

Defining culture is not easy. Definitions in EU Member States differ widely. Some define culture in a narrow sense, as a generic term for arts and heritage. Others, including UNESCO and the Council of Europe, use a wider definition:

"In its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs" (UNESCO, World Conference on Cultural Policies, 1985).

For my purposes today I will employ this wider definition.

Cultural diplomacy is another slippery notion. Indeed, there is a bewildering variety of terms which tend to be used interchangeably, including: foreign cultural affairs, international cultural relations, foreign cultural policy, cultural relations diplomacy, cultural relations policy, and cultural diplomacy. Some have defined cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding". To which I would add: "and to promote fundamental values".

II

That the EU's cultural policy must have an external dimension has long been recognized. Article 151 of the Treaty requires the Community and the Member States to foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the sphere of culture. Over the years the EU has collaborated with the Council of Europe and UNESCO and has signed cooperation and association agreements containing cultural clauses with many non-EU states.

Last year the Union established a single financing and programming instrument for cultural cooperation, entitled the 'Culture Programme', for the period from 2007 through 2013. It is aimed at improving knowledge among European citizens of European cultures other than their own, while at the same time heightening their awareness of the common European cultural heritage they share. The Programme is not intended for EU citizens alone. It also has an external dimension. To ensure coherence and complementarity with Community policies in the field of cultural cooperation with third countries the Commission has been charged with ensuring a link between the Programme and EU external relations. Third countries (EFTA countries, i.e. Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein; candidate countries, countries in the Western Balkans, and countries with association or cooperation agreements which include cultural clauses) may participate in the programme under certain conditions.

Still, the external dimension is clearly felt to be secondary to the internal objectives of the programme. This is clear from the Commission's online consultation about its 2007 Communication on Culture. In preparing what is clearly intended to be a key policy document, the Commission states it has two objectives in mind: developing European citizenship and promoting the objectives of the Lisbon agenda. There is no mention of the external dimension.

The Commission's approach is symptomatic of a more general problem. Even though the Union carries out or finances quite a range of cultural activities in third countries, its policies lack focus. Indeed, the external dimension of the Union's cultural relations is characterized by conceptual confusion.

Sometimes youth policy is regarded as a dimension of international cultural policy, sometimes it is taken to be a subject in its own right. Similarly, education policy in relation to third countries is occasionally treated as part of cultural policy, but at other times not. Sometimes tourism is mixed in with culture, at other times it is not. In the EU Action Plan with Morocco intercultural dialogue is part of cultural cooperation; in the Action Plan with Tunisia it falls under education, training, and youth. In cooperation with Turkey projects to preserve cultural diversity are part of human rights cooperation. It is all a bit of a muddle.

Symptomatic of the lack of conceptual clarity and policy focus is the treatment allotted to cultural cooperation in the Union's relations with its 18 partners under the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The Union's Mediterranean partners benefit from EU financing to protect and promote cultural heritage, the Euromed Heritage Programme. They also participate in the Euromed Audiovisual Programme. The EU's Eastern European partners lack such mechanisms, which, in view of their history, geography, and political orientation must be considered an anomaly. The cultural paragraphs of the Action Plans between the EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are brief and unimaginative; those with Moldova are only slightly less bland. Nor have opportunities for conflict prevention through regional cultural cooperation been identified. Fortunately, the Action Plan with Israel does contain a wide range of detailed and promising common engagements, from cultural and audio-visual issues to a commitment to jointly combat anti-Semitism and hate speech and promote remembrance of, and education about the Holocaust. Here, the issue may be how to ensure adequate implementation of this ambitious agenda.

However, neither the Commission nor the Council seems to have developed an overarching view of the role of cultural relations in the Neighbourhood Policy. The Commission's recent paper on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy contains a section on people-to-people contacts, primarily in the educational sphere, but only two brief references to culture. Nor is culture one of the sectors covered in the Commission's Sectoral Progress Report - an omission which all the more intriguing in light of the fact that the EU does - as mentioned - finance cultural activities under the ENP. Is this perhaps a case of the Commission's right hand (DG RELEX) not knowing what its left hand (DG Education and Culture) has been doing? In any case, the Union clearly lacks a strategic concept for its cultural relations with its immediate neighbours. We have projects; we do not have a policy.

Much the same could be said of the EU's relations with other parts of the world.

The Union's financial mechanism to support stability and peace in the Western Balkans (CARDS), for example, lacked objectives in the area of culture - even though cultural cooperation arguably could have a major contribution to make to regional understanding and the eradication of prejudice. The CARDS programme will be superseded by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance from 2007.

For some years the EU has operated a Northern strategy which includes a cultural dimension. Promoting an open cultural area, raising awareness of cultural heritage, and promoting cultural mobility are among the objectives of the Second Northern Dimension Action Plan (2003). Some cultural projects have indeed been financed, but mostly on an incidental basis.

My third example concerns Asia. Home to one third of mankind, Asian countries are rapidly becoming indispensable to the solution of most global problems, from security to the environment. How Europe is perceived in Asia should thus be of prime concern to European policy-makers. Asian views of Europe tend not to be very flattering. In economic terms Europe is seen as yesterday's continent, in political terms we are perceived to be weak and divided. And yet, Europeans and their cultural heritage are generally regarded sympathetically. Asia should be a natural candidate for European cultural diplomacy. Of course individual European countries should continue to operate their national cultural policies. But would they not pack considerably more punch if they would, at least on occasion, band together? Building on the success of EU film festivals in several parts of the world, why not jointly present European research efforts, or opportunities for education in Europe? The Asia-Europe Foundation could help in organising the necessary activities. Branching out into public diplomacy, European bilateral embassies could perhaps be invited to organise a series of events about aspects of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, including Europe's experience in crisis management. The world has many questions about Europe. In the absence of a common European foreign service it is the task of national diplomatic representations to answer the many questions the world has about European policies, experiences, and values. This task should not be left only to the Commission.

Last year the Council has approved several new financial instruments, which will govern cooperation between the EU and its international partners until 2013. Will these new instruments offer greater opportunities for a coherent and consistent external cultural policy? I would argue that they might, but that this is far from self-evident.

Let us look first at the Regulation establishing the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. This regulation, though it contains little fresh thinking, does include among its objectives "promoting multicultural dialogue, people-to-people contacts, including links with communities of immigrants living in Member States, cooperation between civil societies, cultural institutions and exchanges of young people". It also aims at "protecting historical and cultural heritage and promoting development potential, including through tourism".

Unfortunately, in another illustration of the lack of systematic thinking about cultural diplomacy, these objectives are entirely lacking in the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) that will govern relations between the EU and Croatia, Turkey, the former Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro, and Serbia, including Kosovo (as defined in UNSCR 1244). Still, the IPA does include the development of civil society, reconciliation, regional and cross-border cooperation in its scope for assistance. The Cross-Border Cooperation Component of IPA, in particular, aims at promoting good neighbourly relations, stability and security of all countries concerned. There seems to be scope, therefore, for the fostering of cultural cooperation and inter-cultural dialogue under the IPA, even in the absence of explicit policy objectives. That would certainly appear in line with the intentions of the European Council, which, in December 2004, stated that, in parallel to accession negotiations, the EU should engage in "intensive political and cultural dialogue" with every candidate country.

A third new external financial tool is the regulation establishing a financial instrument for development cooperation. Cultural cooperation is addressed in Articles 5 and 12, which cover, *inter alia*, inter-cultural dialogue, promotion of cultural industries, and promotion of respect for cultural values. Contrary to the 2005 Cotonou Agreement (Article 37) between EU Member States and 78 ACP countries, recognising, preserving and promoting the value of cultural heritage and supporting the development of capacity in this sector are not explicitly mentioned in the new EU instrument.

Several EU Member States have assigned cultural cooperation an explicit part of their national development policy - Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK among them. Interest in Germany is growing. Cultural activities in ACP countries have also been supported by the European Commission. Since 1989 the Commission has contributed about € 116 million to some 380 projects in the areas of music, dance, audiovisual, fashion, crafts, oral tradition and literature. Under the current, 9th European Development Fund two cultural programmes have been identified: one for the Cinema and Audiovisual sector, and one for cultural industries. Thus far, most EU aid to ACP countries appears to have been dedicated to traditional aid projects. Promoting inter-cultural cooperation and dialogue with Europe has not figured prominently. There is clearly scope for a more systematic approach to cultural cooperation as a dimension of development policy. In 2006, the Commission's Directorate General for Development initiated work on a draft Communication on culture in EU development policy.

As this brief overview illustrates, there is no coherence in the way international cultural cooperation is dealt with by the Union. Culture does play a part - though a relatively small one - in the Union's relations with the ACP countries and with its Mediterranean partners, but its significance in relations with the Balkans, Asia and Latin America appears to be considerably underrated. Even in relation to the countries across the Mediterranean much of the potential of cultural diplomacy as an instrument of foreign policy has yet to be developed. Synergies between the Neighbourhood Instrument and the Instrument for promotion of Democracy and Human Rights worldwide also still need to be established. Nor are opportunities to promote the Union's values being identified systematically. It is time, therefore, for the Union to define its principles and to set priorities based on a common view. In other words, it is time for the European Union to develop an overall policy framework for culture in its external relations.

III

This brings me to the third part of my presentation. What should a European external cultural policy consist of? How can the current disparate collection of projects and programmes be moulded into a strategy serving both Europe's cultural interests and its foreign and security policy, following the example of several of its Member States? In addition to traditional tasks such as defending the worldwide economic interests of Europe's cultural sectors, such a strategy, it seems to me, should include at least four dimensions: strengthening the rule of law; developing cultural diplomacy as an instrument of conflict prevention and management; promoting cultural and educational exchanges; and creating mechanisms for inter-religious cooperation and dialogue.

Strengthening the rule of law, not only in Europe but globally, is one of the central objectives of European foreign policy. This objective is relevant also in relation to culture. Ratification of the UNESCO conventions is one of the objectives of the Union - at least in relation to the partner countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy. Ratification of the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity has even been made a prerequisite for participation by ENP-countries in the MEDIA 2007 Programme. References to the need to ratify this Convention have been included in the EU Action Plans with several ENP partners. Important as these initiatives are, they do not yet appear to form part of a wider EU strategy to promote the ratification and implementation of all UNESCO conventions. Rarely - if ever - do EU Foreign Ministers include a call to ratify and implement cultural conventions in dialogues with their counterparts from third countries. In the past three years I do not recall having come across a single example.

Campaigning for universalization of international Conventions is an established practice of the Union - from the Convention against the financing of terrorism to the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court. The time has come for the European Union to systematically urge its partners to ratify and implement all seven UNESCO Conventions in the field of culture, including the 2005 Convention on Cultural Diversity. The Union should also encourage ratification and implementation of the relevant Council of Europe's Conventions, such as the Convention for the Protection of Architectural Heritage. The European Parliament, through its network of delegations, could equally bring useful pressure to bear.

Strengthening the rule of law also implies defending and promoting freedom of expression. Combating censorship, harassment and oppression of journalists, promoting literacy and supporting independent media must be a priority of EU foreign policy. Defending freedom of religion equally must be among the EU's visible concerns. This means that EU Foreign Ministers must speak out when people, including Islamic fundamentalists, are jailed or muzzled for the peaceful expression of their views or beliefs. Care must also be taken, particularly by the Commission, to ensure complementarity and synergy between the tools for cultural diplomacy and the instruments to defend human rights, and to avoid the risk that the new funding instruments, including the financing instrument for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide, will be used in a disjointed fashion by different Directorates General. Translating more European books, films and websites into Arabic, for example, would be an excellent way to bolster the right to freedom of information in Arab countries as well as to promote cultural dialogue with Europe.

Second, the Union and the Member states should devote more systematic reflection to the role of cultural diplomacy in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. The Union's own experience in overcoming enmity among its peoples may hold lessons that others would be interested to consider. Such, indeed, is the experience of the Goethe Institute and other private actors in their work in Africa and Asia. Worldwide, examples abound of cultural cooperation as a mechanism to address stereotypes, prejudice, and associated *'Feindbilder'*. One example reported by the Swiss Foreign Ministry is the Macedonian TV series *Nashe Maalo*, a children's programme in a country where Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Roma communities coexist. The central figure in the series is "Karmen", a personification of the building in which many of the young characters - who represent different ethnicities - live. Karmen uses her special powers to transport the children magically into someone else's reality. In this way, the children gain an understanding of each other's lives. An academic study has shown that after viewing many children gave less prejudiced descriptions when presented with images of people from other groups.

Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001 the EU has played a growing role in crisis management and peace-keeping. It has organised 12 civilian and military crisis management missions so far; a police mission to Afghanistan is being planned. As part of its overall policy mix in crisis prevention and crisis management the EU needs to develop instruments of inter-cultural dialogue. The Commission should invite Europe's leading researchers to submit relevant analysis and proposals..

Third, people-to-people contacts must be at the heart of any cultural policy, including that of the Union. All available literature and experience suggests that cultural diplomacy - like the wider activity of public diplomacy - can succeed only when it is a two-way street, where receiving messages and listening to others are as valuable as spreading one's own message. Indeed, the importance of listening is part of our European message. In terms of the EU's budgetary priorities, however, most attention has so far been directed at traditional aid projects, as opposed to projects in the sphere of cooperation and exchange. The latter are, admittedly, more difficult to organize. They also hold considerable more promise for spreading the values of the Union.

More than 1.2 million students have so far benefited from the Erasmus Programme, and it has been a brilliant idea to extend this flagship programme to students from outside Europe. A globalizing world needs mechanisms to enable people to link up with each other directly instead of only through the filter of the media. The Erasmus Mundus Programme can play a major role in fostering a better understanding among EU citizens and people elsewhere. However, with a total of 1600 scholarships for all of the world combined the impact of this initiative will remain limited.

The Tempus programme funds projects between the higher education sector in the EU and its 26 partner countries in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. Tempus is financed through three instruments: the Instrument for Pre-Accession, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, and the Development and Cooperation Instrument. If this is not yet complicated enough, cooperation in the field of higher education with Latin America (Alfa; Alban) is not covered by Tempus but by a different instrument. Cooperation projects with the US, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand are also managed and financed separately. So is educational cooperation with the ACP countries (EduLink). This disparate collection of instruments may be understood as reflecting the past development of bilateral relations. However, a wider EU concept - an integrated approach to international educational cooperation and exchange - is long overdue. This would help to avoid ad-hoc initiatives and inconsistency. It may have been appropriate for the Union to support the creation of a common education area with Latin America (Article 6 of the Financial instrument for development cooperation), for example, but why has something similar not been agreed with countries closer to home, such as the EU's neighbours in the Balkans?

In addition to educational and youth exchanges, cultural exchanges can play an important role in public diplomacy. Promoting Europe's unique cultural and linguistic diversity should be one of its objectives, including in relation to third countries. The promotion and protection of (common) cultural heritage, tangible as well as intangible, should be another. It is important to recognise that Europe has a lot to learn from other cultures and traditions, as well as a lot to offer. Our purpose should be, in the words of the British Council, to build lasting relationships based on trust, mutual understanding and respect. Here, as elsewhere, direct contact between individuals is indispensable to ensure success.

People-to-people contacts need to involve artists, journalists, and other cultural multipliers. They also need, as a matter of priority, to involve religious leaders. Religion is central to cultural identity. Inter-religious exchange and dialogue must therefore be a central component of inter-cultural exchange and dialogue. This, in my view, should be the fourth priority issue in designing the Union's foreign cultural policy. It is particularly important to reach out to mainstream Muslims, in Europe as well as abroad. Terrorism in the name of Islam will not be eradicated unless mainstream Muslims unite against it. Winning Muslim hearts and minds is critical to winning the fight against terrorism. The coming Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) offers an excellent opportunity to start building the necessary networks, notably between Europe and its partners in Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. But the EU's work in fostering inter-religious cooperation and dialogue will not end in 2008. These efforts will have to be maintained for many years, including in the framework of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which has already hosted several interfaith dialogues. Trust is not built overnight. Commitment to long-term partnership will be necessary. Multi-annual programmes offer the best chance of success - not disjointed projects.

Finally, who should be responsible for developing the EU foreign cultural policy: the European Commission or the Council of Ministers? As anyone familiar with the arcane disputes about competence between the Council and the Commission will acknowledge, this is a tricky issue. Fortunately it is also a fairly simple one. In view of the Council's competence for foreign policy, and Member States' competence for most of cultural policy, the Council would have to agree any statement of policy. However, the Commission would have to prepare it.

The Commission's expertise and experience in financing cultural cooperation projects are unique and it would be foolish to ignore this. Having the Commission prepare a Communication would have the additional advantage of obliging different DGs to work together. A useful starting point would be to draw up an inventory of all cultural actions currently carried out or planned.

In preparing its Communication the Commission would need to consult closely with the EUNIC network of nineteen European national cultural institutes, which was established in May 2006. There are obvious and powerful synergies to be obtained through close collaboration between the Union and these national institutes. Cultural diplomacy, by its very nature, cannot be the exclusive preserve of governments. Private actors and organisations have an equally valuable role to play.

How vital a role is shown on a daily basis by our co-host of today, the Goethe Institute. The Goethe Institute is, of course, the German international cultural institute. But in its official mission statement and in its daily work it also takes pride in identifying itself as a European cultural institution. "Das Goethe-Institut ist eine europäische Kulturinstitution." Indeed it is. May the cultural institutes of the other Member States take heed. European cultural identity is about diversity. We should never forget that it is also, and equally, about unity.

Gijs de Vries is an associate of the Clingendael Institute for International Relations. He is a former member of the Dutch Government and of the European Convention. From 2004-2007 he served as the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator.