ifa ECP Monitor

The New Nationalisms and the Future of Cultural Relations: External Cultural Policy in an Age of Political Extremes

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Abstract

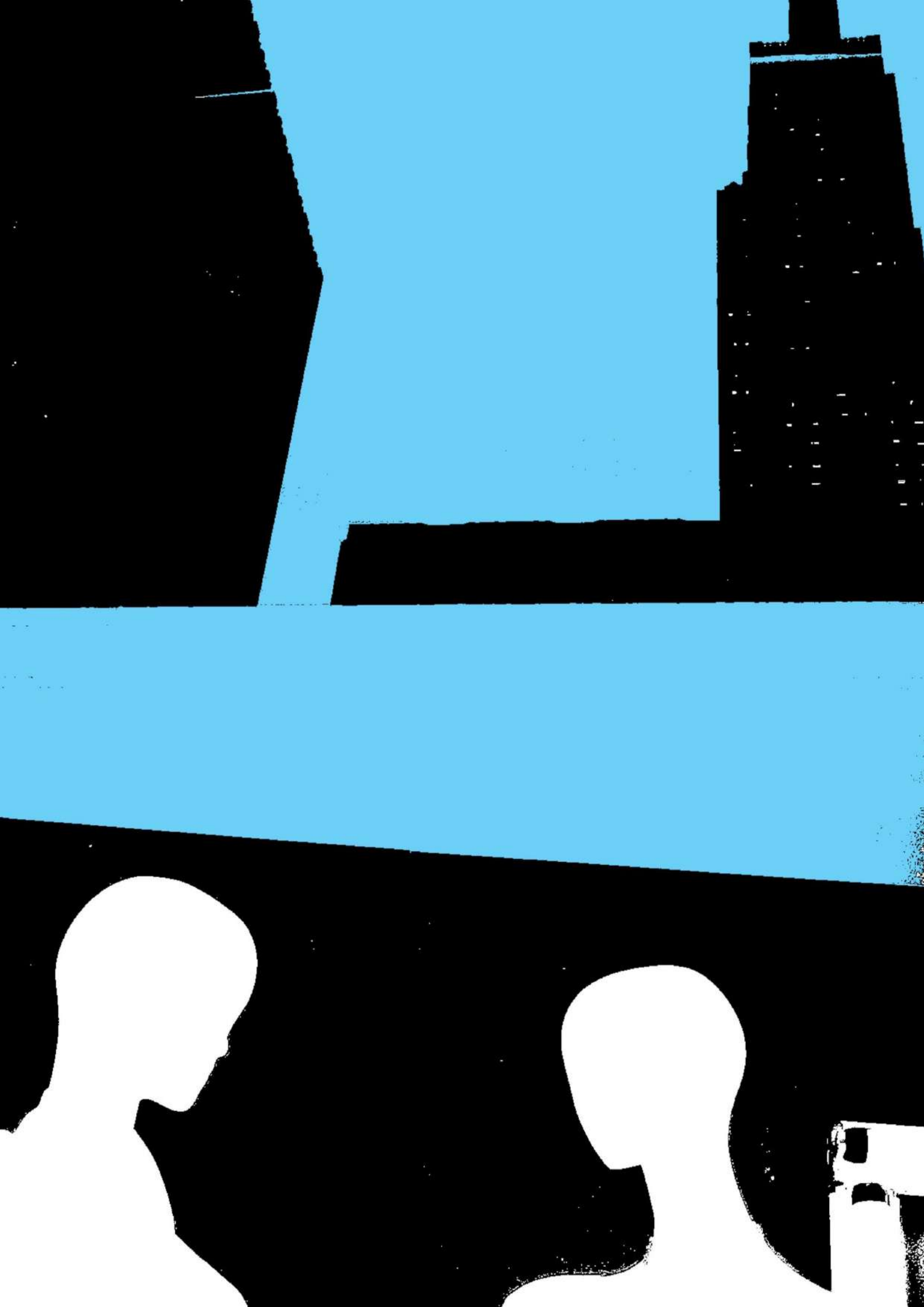
This paper explores the impact of rising nationalism on soft power by analysing the external cultural policies (ECP) of eight countries: Germany, France, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States, China, Russia, and Turkey. It argues that ECP will increasingly operate in a zero-sum international environment shaped by nationalism, with its domestic effects varying across nations. While institutions in France are more exposed to nationalist influence, the 'arm's length' principle offers greater protection in the UK and Germany, and the diversity of private actors serves as a protective buffer in the United States. Nationalistic ECP in China, Russia, and Turkey is anticipated to grow, while Poland exemplifies institutional resistance to nationalism. The paper then proceeds into a case study of the current discourse in Germany, contrasting the views of different nationalist parties about German ECP. Finally, recommendations are proposed for countries like Germany and other European nations: support the arm's-length principle of key institutions; enhance coordination among ECP actors domestically and within the EU; shield against malign foreign influence; create and communicate anti-nationalist narratives; proactively leveraging existing strengths and opportunities.

Executive Summary

How will the rise of nationalism affect the role that soft power plays in the international system? To explore this question, this paper reviews the external cultural policies (ECP) of eight countries in the context of growing nationalism, drawing on insights derived from the External Cultural Policy Monitor. In examining Germany, France, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United States, China, Russia, and Turkey, the paper covers significant varieties of soft power approaches. They have in common that they are major players in the field of ECP while experiencing different degrees and forms of nationalism. A case study of Germany explores the challenges that rising nationalism poses to the practice of ECP in liberal democracies and seeks to develop policy solutions to these problems.

The paper argues that future ECP will take place in an international environment increasingly characterized by zero-sum interactions with more openly competitive dynamics than at any time since the Cold War. It is an environment both fostered and exacerbated by nationalism. The actual domestic threat it poses to ECP, however, varies significantly between countries. It is more acute in France and Italy, where key institutions are more directly exposed, than in the United Kingdom and Germany, where the 'arm's length' principle provides a better shield against nationalist intrusion. Nationalism in the US will manifest itself very differently depending on partisan control of the key institutions, but its diversity of private actors protects American ECP to a greater extent than in Europe. Nationalistic ECP in China, Russia and Turkey will continue to rise and pose even more serious challenges to Germany and its partners. At the same time, Poland offers an important example of how ECP institutions can resist nationalist governments.

We recommend that Germany, and by implications its partners, need to prepare for such a challenging scenario. We suggest that they can do so by: future-proofing legal bases and governance systems against nationalist intrusion; learning from each other and improving coordination among intermediaries and major actors in the field both domestically and within the EU; building defence mechanisms against malign influences from abroad; creating and communicating a narrative of success and prosperity celebrating freedom and the liberal order; and systematically building on given programmatic strengths and pro-actively realizing opportunities as they emerge.



1. Introduction

External cultural policy (ECP) traditionally relies on notions of a positive-sum world and a belief in the mutual benefits of cultural relations. For example, the German Foreign Office emphasizes that ECP should "create the basis for international exchange and mutual understanding, even when things get politically difficult" and "connect people from different countries to enable sustainable relationships" (Auswärtiges Amt, 2021). This approach is typical of many soft power 'superpowers,' from China's approach (prior to Xi Jinping's policy turnaround) of fostering "mutual respect, peaceful co-existence, and win-win cooperation" (Yang, 2023) or the French notion of "*diplomatie culturelle et d'influence*," which aims to spread French culture while emphasizing diversity and equal exchange (Institut français, n.d.).

Although the pursuit of soft power as part of cultural relations has never been entirely separable from *realpolitik* considerations in its geopolitical and geoeconomic goals, these statements do speak to the optimistic assumptions embedded in many ECP narratives—namely that the world does not inherently tend toward conflict and that emphasizing shared values and cooperation can help foster a more peaceful international environment. This view was relatively well-suited to the "end of history" moment in the years following the end of the Cold War, and it is likely no coincidence that during the 1990s and 2000s many more countries began to build soft power assets and entered the ECP sphere in earnest (Anheier et al., 2023).

However, the current geopolitical zeitgeist seems to diverge more and more from the earlier, more optimistic, era of global cooperation and multilateralism. Indeed, resurgent nationalism is an increasingly dominant political current for a growing number of countries, ranging from the "MAGA" movement in the US to post-fascist currents in Italy to Russian imperialism and China's desire to atone for its "century of humiliation." Although form and intensity of nationalism vary across countries, the resurgence of zero-sum and confrontational international politics threatens the very basis of ECP. At the same time, many countries that have been most assertive on the international stage have also been major proponents of the use of soft power. This raises the question: how will the rise of nationalism affect how ECP is practiced today?

To explore this question, this paper reviews the state of ECP in the context of growing nationalism, drawing on insights derived from the External Cultural Policy Monitor and the over 50 country reports and comparative studies it covers.[1] In particular, we focus on eight countries: Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, China, Russia, and Turkey. These countries have in common that they are major players in the field of ECP and soft power while experiencing or confronting nationalism in different forms and to varying intensity. We also include Poland which offers major lessons on how to respond the nationalism in this case the PiS (Law and Justice) governments under Jarosław Kaczyński.

[1] The External Cultural Policy (ECP) Monitor provides relevant information on the Foreign Cultural and Educational Policy measures of selected countries. Compact country profiles and reports structure quantitative data and context-related information, for example on culture and art, language, education, science and research and the media. See https://www.ifa.de/en/research/ecp-monitor/ and https://www.hertie-school.org/en/international-security/research/soft-power.

To address what role nationalism plays and could play in ECP, this paper proceeds as follows. First, it surveys the nationalist currents found in the nine countries, and how they currently relate to ECP. Next, it compares these currents and asks how new these new nationalisms actually are. It then takes a closer look at the German case before assessing the implications of rising nationalism on ECP now that the country is subject to potentially radical disruption by the far-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and the left-wing nationalist *Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht* (BSW). Finally, it concludes and asks what measures liberal democracies like Germany could implement—both to stave off the corrosive effect of nationalism at home and to guard against other countries' increasingly combative effects to attain and project soft power.

2. Varieties of Nationalism—and their Role in Shaping ECP

Nationalism as an ideology is resurgent. It both contributes to, and is exacerbated by, an increasingly tense geopolitical climate. To understand what this means for the future of ECP, it is useful to look at what the 'new nationalisms' are all about. Nationalism has many variants, yet in essence they come down to five key ideological components as proposed by Garner (2022). Slightly modified and abbreviated, they amount to a claim about the order of the world by postulating that:

- The world is divided into distinct and unique nations;
- The nation state is the ultimate source of political legitimacy;
- National loyalty outranks all other loyalties;
- Nations are communities of fate, must be autonomous, live their traditions and express their culture; and, finally
- The nation is the source of progress.

That the world is unlike what these claims posit is political motivation for nationalists and their drive to restore the envisioned unity of people and state. In that way, the new nationalisms resemble older forms. However, unlike their 19th century predecessors, the new nationalisms are no longer the engine of state making and modernization as scholars like Gellner (1983) and Hobsbawm (1990) suggested. They are essentially backward-looking instruments of power and control, aiming for a past unlikely to have ever existed but that is vivid in the societal memory and vision of supporters, providing meaning and interpretative frames to a disorderly world. Modern nationalism seeks a partial withdrawal from the inter-connections of a globalized world, including the international system of multilateral organizations, and reveals distinct mercantilist and isolationist elements.

Beyond the tendency to look back with confidence to an envisioned past, Thumann (2020, pp. 14-15) suggests that the new nationalisms reveal several characteristics that to various degrees have been present in the old nationalism, but that in their specific combination are more pronounced in its newer forms. He puts these characteristics forward in the form of theses that, slightly reformulated, could be stated as follows:

- The new nationalisms are based on the narrative of victimhood, see the culprit in the 'other' and in 'otherness,' and are given to the aggrandizement of self-ascribed virtues;
- The new nationalisms resemble less the deeply patriotic nationalists of the past but are more an ideology useful to opportunistic politicians and kleptocrats to advance careers and cement power;
- The instrumental character of the new nationalisms makes them a more vacuous and limited as an ideology; and
- Whereas nationalism was originally a Western ideology, it has become an 'export model', ready for instrumentalization in diverse settings and circumstance (e.g., Eastern Europe, Turkey, Russia, India or China).

Thus, the new nationalisms differ from each other and from past nationalisms in a matter of degree and the intensity they can generate. What accounts for variations among the new nationalisms are the value base on which they rest (e.g., religious, ethnic, cultural), and who uses the ideology in what circumstance (e.g., left or right-wing populists) and for what end (e.g., domestic power struggles or geopolitical positioning). In autocracies in particular, these efforts take on a multi-spectrum character, fusing cultural, economic, and military power to undermine the liberal order (Applebaum 2024).

This takes different forms in each country, though. For example, the new German nationalism is decidedly secular, wants to modify the past (both by either rejecting or downplaying German war guilt, the Holocaust and the many atrocities committed), assumes that German economic might and prosperity after World War II are more a result of German moral virtues like hard work and discipline than structural factors like allied assistance and favorable terms of trade, and feels that 'German values' are threatened by both inside (e.g., multiculturalism, 'woke' politics) and outside (e.g., immigration, globalization) forces.

French nationalism, too, is secular—to the point that the secularism itself forms a core part of its identity. France's approach appeals to deeply rooted Republican ideals it sees corrupted by immigrants and Islam. Italian nationalism is similarly anti-immigrant but is more about socially conservative Catholic values and a refusal to condemn Italy's fascist past. Polish nationalism, too, is deeply rooted in Catholicism, and a sense of victimhood. British nationalism is largely driven by English chauvinism and nostalgia for its imperial past, sharing similar anti-immigrant tropes with European neighbors. American nationalism, by contrast, is mostly about enforcing a deeply ideological version of (largely Evangelical) Christianity and the need to (re)assert American primacy and white ethnic identity. Russian nationalism, which also has strong religious undertones is about restoring the glory of past greatness unfairly degraded by 'Western decadence' and the nefarious geopolitical influence wrought by the end of the Soviet Union. Past grievances also fuel Chinese nationalism, which is as much about domestic control as it is about the restoration of the "Middle Kingdom" as the rightful global power next to the US. Turkish nationalism, increasingly religious, addresses past grievances, too, seeks respect as major regional power and uses nationalism for political control at home.

In addition to having distinct narratives of the past, varying religious foundations and political ideologies (right-wing, left-wing), and different geopolitical positionings, each country's particular form of nationalism also manifests itself differently in terms of the ECP approaches. These are detailed below, with a special focus on the policy positions espoused by the major nationalist parties or political movements in each country.

2.1. Germany

Since its founding in 2013, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) has transitioned from a party focused on conservative economics to one combatting immigration, rejecting Islam, and advocating for a resurgence of German national pride and identity. The AfD has published several policy papers relating to ECP, most prominently a 2024 position paper, which reads like a wish list for right-wing culture warriors, decrying gendered language in schools abroad, arguing

for the Goethe-Institut to focus more clearly on 'German' culture, and against decolonial actions like the repatriation of cultural artifacts, including the famous Benin Bronzes (AfD, 2024). In this document and other interviews, Matthias Moosdorf, who is the AfD representative on the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on External Educational and Cultural Policy, decries notions of German and European historical guilt, suggesting instead that ECP should also address the positive aspects of colonialism (Moosdorf, 2023).

This stands in contrast to the broad consensus as to the importance of ECP that has long existed within Germany's policy circles, and the successive governments which have expanded the range of activities and resources allocated to them over time. Germany's main stated ECP goals are to promote the German language and culture abroad, to build trust and create a nuanced image of Germany, with the aim of ensuring friendly relations with other countries. Specifically, this has meant creating a 'pre-political' space for dialogue and discourse for the promotion of open societies, especially support for human rights, freedom of expression, and civil society through 'arm's length' institutions that receive governmental funding but are not directly controlled by politicians. In practice, these goals have often been closely linked to establishing and deepening economic and trade relations as well (Sokolowska 2013).

The rise in geopolitical tensions, the 2022 energy crisis triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, an economic slowdown, and a tighter public purse have meant greater uncertainty for Germany's ECP. They also affected budgets: while cuts were modest thus far, they are likely to be more severe in the future amidst strategic reviews of future programmatic and regional priorities as well as strained public finances. In this context, the ideological disruption of AfD and BSW means further uncertainty for the already-uncertain financial and geopolitical developments that have affected Germany's ECP in recent years.

However, the traditional 'arm's length' approach to ECP with the prominent role of intermediaries has benefits in times of political challenges. Their far-reaching independence makes it difficult for political parties to control and instrumentalize these institutions, at least in the short term. What is more, the German ECP model is among the most decentralized of major soft power countries, with many governmental and private actors (Knudsen & Markovic, 2021). The resulting coordination challenges across the numerous governmental and non-governmental ECP actors on the other side can have negative effects, especially with respect to strategic planning and coordination. While these issues can plague efforts to rapid strategic retooling of policy, they could also somewhat insulate German ECP from the influence of the far-right and far-left.

Thus, the nationalist tones struck in the AfD's ECP and the BSW's pro-Russian, anti-American stance would be difficult to implement, even in the unlikely event that they enter government at the federal level. The greater risk of nationalist influence on ECP is via mainstream parties, which, in trying to counteract the rise of extremists, may accept some of their rhetoric and programmatic ideas either implicitly or explicitly, with immigration being a prime example. Such a development would not only lead to an erosion of the current ECP model, but also likely alarm partners accustomed to Germany's traditionally humble and positive-sum approach to soft power and jeopardize many past achievements.

2.2. France

The National Rally (*Rassemblement National*, hereafter referred to as RN), France's largest of the two neo-nationalist parties next to the left-wing *La France Insoumise*, has been a growing contender in the political arena for some time. The result of the 2024 snap legislative elections is a clear indicator of this upwards momentum, with the RN gaining fifty more seats in the National Assembly than what it had previously held.

The RN started as the *Front National* in the 1970s, established to grant political legitimacy to far-right reactions against the 1968 movement and growing immigration from the Maghreb (Cremer, 2023). In recent times, the party has sought to distance itself from its most extremist positions, a movement spearheaded by two-times presidential candidate Marine Le Pen. These measures included a strategic name-change and the expulsion of several inflammatory key figures, including her father Jean-Marine Le Pen, founder of the party. Nevertheless, the RN remains a staunch exemplar of Europe's new nationalism: the protection of France's culture and economy is a core element of its political program. The party is also awash in accusations of inciting anti-immigrant sentiments, Islamophobia, and antisemitism.

Presently, France's ECP network is well-established, with cultural diplomacy being a key pillar of its foreign policy. Its activities have extensive geographic reach, focusing on the promotion of the French language and arts. The French notion of '*exception culturelle*' (cultural exception)—which means that culture and the arts are inherently different from other policy fields and thus require special investments and protections (Perrin et al., 2016)—carries over from national cultural policy to foreign policy and international economic relations.

The current model also favors equitable access to culture and the appreciation of different artistic movements, summarized by the twin terms of "democratization of culture" and "cultural democracy", respectively (Perrin & Delvainquière, 2023). These notions guide the policy of the Ministry of Culture and encourage diversity in France's cultural output, empowering urban artistic expressions and artists of diverse cultural backgrounds, such as those from other Francophone countries. The current government's 'Cultural Pass' program, which gives youths a voucher to benefit from cultural offers, is also an extension of this cultural policy focused on inclusion (Ministère de la Culture, 2022).

The RN does offer a nod towards the importance of sustaining the Francophonie network; its proposal of international cooperation seems to be limited to creating a Ministry for Overseas Territories to expand the mainland's influence. Many of its proposed policies revolve around restricting immigration, including altering family reunification policies and limiting social benefits to French citizens. In its own words, RN also seeks to combat "Islamist ideologies" and its policy proposal places great emphasis on the preservation of the "French civilization" (RN, 2024), a hallmark of its cultural nationalism.

While its program says little on promoting culture or the arts, there is an entire thematic section dedicated to heritage preservation. Heritage here refers narrowly to physical heritage, such as buildings, landscapes or historical sites, which are said to be the "perfect example of French

civilization" (RN, n.d., p. 5). Proposed measures include tax cuts for property owners and youth programs. RN also proposes the privatization of the French public media, including foreign broadcasters (RN, 2024, p. 18).

If the RN does come into power, it is possible that many national policies for the promotion of arts and culture with a focus on multicultural expressions will be downgraded. The notion of arts and culture in the strict sense of fine arts and traditional French culture and heritage preservation will likely prevail. The protectionist approach of the "cultural exception" is expected to remain, however cultural expressions outside the view of "French civilization" will likely lose space. In other words, the pillar of "cultural democracy", which embraces the plurality of cultural output, will be weakened.

While France's ECP operators such as the *Alliance Française* do enjoy a degree of political independence, it is unclear if this independence will resist a nationalist government for long. Anti-immigrant and racist domestic politics will conflict with the ECP operators' promotion of cultural diversity. Most likely, there would also be less interest in European cooperation in the field of arts and culture.

2.3. Italy

The success of the center-right coalition in the 2022 Italian elections meant that Giorgia Meloni—leader of the party Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*, hereafter referred to as FdI)—is not only the country's first female Prime Minister but currently also the most powerful of Europe's neo-nationalists, leading the most right-wing government since World War II. Indeed, FdI has roots in late 1940s' post-war fascism, being a source of political legitimacy for far-right extremists and fascist sympathizers after Mussolini's death. Meloni has attempted to put distance between her current government and FdI's fascist past, similar to Marine Le Pen's rebranding of the RN in France. Meloni's government has shifted to a more conventional version of European right-wing topics (Lowen, 2024): for example, by focusing on restricting immigration rather than demanding large-scale remigration, and seeking to reverse the country's low and declining birth rates by emphasizing religion and family values.

What is more, the need for international cooperation—especially considering the country's deep embeddedness in the EU and its high sovereign debt—is a likely cause for a further tempering of the party's political stances, at least for the time being. Nevertheless, the party remains staunchly entrenched in religious conservatism and nationalism, as exemplified by its slogan: "God, homeland, family". Moderation since in power notwithstanding, Meloni's government is a strong exemplar of European neo-nationalism: while it does not fully expunge its ties to Italian fascism, it also seems reluctant to crack down on openly fascist movements such as the *Forza Nuova*. A declaration by Meloni in May 2024 signals that she has not eschewed the possibility of collaboration with far-right actors on the broader European stage (Roberts, 2024).

In terms of ECP, Italy possesses strong ECP institutions, which were partially put in place already under Mussolini, starting with the establishment of the first Italian Institutes of Culture (IIC) in 1926 (Markovic & Winkler, 2021). Indeed, cultural policy has long been used by

nationalists to obtain favorable political outcomes at home and abroad. Meloni's government appears to understand the importance of culture and communication as a way of swaying public opinion, as exemplified by the government's interference in public media. The Italian public broadcaster (RAI) increasingly acts as a mouthpiece for the current administration and has lost some of its independence, sparking protests from journalists (Giuffrida, 2024). It's important to note that RAI's domestic and foreign programming overlap: for example, TG1, the main news program, is also transmitted extensively on international channels. TG1 was subject of controversy when an outsider, sponsored by Meloni, was placed in top management (Castigliani, 2024; Spaziante, 2023). Therefore, it can be assumed that the foreign broadcasting arm of RAI is also subject to the government's influence.

Tensions between cultural institutions and the government intensified as FdI began to usher in representatives into influential positions in the main cultural operators (Oltermann, 2023), or through the aforementioned controversies on the nation's public broadcaster. What is more, the government tends to promote art through the lens of conservative religious ideologies. For example, the Italian government funded a lavish exhibition of J. R. R. Tolkien's works that toured the country and exalted its values of Christian faith, beauty and purity (Oltermann, 2023; Pecqueur, 2024). On a more international level, the right-wing journalist Pietrangelo Buttafuoco was appointed to head the Venice Biennale, one of the most influential cultural exhibitions in the world, a nomination supported by the FdI (Oltermann & Tondo, 2023). The 2024 Frankfurt Book Fair also proved to be similarly controversial, when influential author Roberto Saviano, a noted critic of Meloni's government, was excluded from the official selection of authors chosen to represent Italy. Deeming Saviano's exclusion a form of censorship, many of his colleagues withdrew from participating in the Book Fair as a sign of protest (Oltermann, 2024).

It is likely that the Meloni administration's instrumentalization of culture will spill over to its foreign affairs. Meloni has signaled interest in becoming a figurehead for the right in Europe, and form coalitions with other similarly inclined parties, with Italy at the helm. In this context, it could be likely that Meloni would seek to bring the IIC in line with her politics, as she has already shown to do in the case of RAI.

FdI's 2022 cultural program highlights "cancel culture and iconoclasm" among the greatest threats to Italian religious traditions and identity and signals a push for a "new Italian imaginary" by promoting Italy's achievements and success in school curricula and the like (FdI, n.d.). While these announcements have yet to become policies, they illustrate FdI's strong nationalist ideology, framing dissent and criticism not only as an attack on the party, but as an attack on Italy itself. This form of weaponization of cultural policy can have serious repercussions to those who oppose it, intensifying anti-immigration, racist sentiments, thereby emboldening movements even further to the right of Meloni's party.

2.4. Poland

Poland's recent electoral experience shows that the rise of nationalist politics is not inexorable—or at least that it can be stymied temporarily. During the eight years (2015-2023) of far-right rule by the Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* or PiS) party, Poland experienced a steady decline in the strength of its democratic institutions. The most affected areas were the media, the judiciary, local governance, and civil society. This had an impact on ECP as the government enacted several repressive policies targeted to undermine the autonomy of institutions and bring them under greater PiS control. These policies were met with both domestic and international criticism, and although there have been some improvements since the election of a centrist coalition under Donald Tusk in 2023, the damage from nationalist policies can not immediately be undone.

The relative newness of its cultural institutions is one reason why Poland's ECP is relatively vulnerable to nationalist threats. It was only in 1999 that the Ministry of Culture finally initiated a program to promote Polish culture abroad. Still, the country itself was rapidly able to achieve a strong reputation as a stable and economically successful post-communist state. This was aided by EU funding during the initial transition period and until it became a member state in 2004. In addition to significant EU funds, the large Polish diaspora community helped internationalize Poland's cultural relations, greatly facilitated by the many historical cultural icons such as Maria Skłodowska-Curie, Mikolaj Kopernik, Fryderyk Chopin, and Nobel prize winner Olga Nawoja Tokarczuk, next to political figures like Lech Wałęsa. The period from 2000-2015 also saw a close link between economic growth and ECP, with the idea of "Polska Brand" combining the two.

Given its traumatic history, narratives of national injury and trauma have long been essential to Poland's internal and external image. However, the PiS government took these to a new level and instrumentalized them for political ends, vehemently criticizing neighbors and rousing domestic fervor for domestic ends. In the future, Polish external cultural policy needs to both embrace its history and focus more on the present and contemporary culture. Only in such a way can the Polish heritage and remembrance policy and a modern external cultural policy be reconciled—but a resurgence of PiS or other nationalist forces may endanger this.

2.5. United Kingdom

The resurgence of nationalism in the UK has taken on a different form compared to continental Europe, largely because of the country's 'first-past-the-post' electoral system, which limits the ability of fringe parties like the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), the Brexit Party, or the Reform Party to enter Parliament. As a result, British far-right politics has been mostly making inroads in the center-right Conservative Party, rather than having a standalone right-wing party seize a substantial number of seats in the House of Commons. The decision to leave the European Union after the 2016 referendum is the most prominent example of this trend, but the right-wing influence on the mainstream has also been noticeable in ECP fields like foreign media and international education.

Although the Reform Party received substantially fewer seats than its vote share would have garnered in a proportional system (only 5 of 650 seats for 14.3% of the votes cast), some of its ideas are influential. For example, their platform argues for limiting dependents that foreign students can bring and scrapping license fee funding for the BBC, both policies entertained by the Tories when they were in government (Reform UK, 2024).

Despite British cultural diplomacy's long tradition and immense prestige, the country's ECP has faced severe headwinds in the last two decades, especially since the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 and later the 2016 Brexit referendum. In the context of overall austerity budgets, the focus of consecutive Conservative governments has been on cost-cutting, increasing the financial self-reliance of the institutions involved, especially the British Council and the BBC, while at the same time pursuing their closer integration into an overarching strategy of the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO).

Rather than pure geopolitical instrumentalization, the more noticeable trend in the ECP approach of the British right is toward linking it closely with economic policy (Knudsen, 2021b). Indeed, after coming to power in 2009, the various Tory governments have seen no contradiction between cultural promotion and economic interests. Reflecting the emphasis on the commercial value added, British ECP is to contribute to the country's competitiveness and prosperity, with the 'GREAT' campaign as a prime example. While British cultural institutions have continued to hold significant sway in many fields, political tensions under the previous Tory governments and ongoing financial shortfalls have placed significant pressure on ECP institutions.

However, the recently elected Labour government has argued for a soft power council (yet to be named officially) that "brings together leading figures from across arts, culture, creative industries and academia to work together to advance the national interest" (Lammy, 2024), suggesting that the UK may shift course slightly from the economic to the political. At the same time, Labour has also stressed the need to grow the UK economy, indicating that the core tenets of British ECP are unlikely to change dramatically (Labour Party, 2024).

While it is improbable for the far-right to enter government any time soon, it still can influence British ECP through both pressure on mainstream parties and shaping international images. In the first case, UKIP's political pressure contributed to Conservative (and anti-Brexit) Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to seek a referendum to leave the European Union in 2016. On the second mechanism, the 2024 racist riots across the UK—and their widespread international coverage—have shown how a relatively small group of radicals can have a large influence. Anti-immigrant sentiment also directly contradicts the higher education funding model, which relies heavily on international students from the Global South as the number of incoming EU students has significantly dropped since Brexit. Furthermore, budget cuts and at least temporarily greater isolation from Europe after Brexit cast the aspiration of 'Global Britain' in doubt, even as the Labour party has made some gestures toward revamping British soft power.

2.6. United States

In the United States, ECP clearly plays a subordinate role to other aspects of foreign policy. This is due in part to the American understanding of art and culture, which is seen more as a product of individual initiative and less of national prestige and effort (Knudsen, 2024). For the most part, the American federal government does not perceive it as its task to promote or protect a national high culture with taxpayers' money, a sentiment that carries over into ECP. For the US, current ECP echoes Cold War-era narratives about 'liberty' and the 'free world'. This (relatively) hands-off narrative has been somewhat validated in the US case, as American mass culture and lifestyle have an enormous influence worldwide, despite lacking broad direct government support. Examples include the music and film industries, which are strong exporters, as well as mass media generally and including the US dominance of social media sites. In addition, the vast and prestigious US university system enjoys international appeal like no other.

The rise of the right-wing—especially under the auspices of Trump's 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) movement—has shaken many core components of US foreign policy, most notably support for free trade, commitments to traditional alliances, and acceptance of at least some immigration. The disruption also extends to elements of ECP, such as attempts to politicize foreign media. Still, the overall impact on US soft power does not seem to have been substantial—although this could change in a second Trump administration. Part of this reflects the luxury of the US position: precisely because the US can rely on the immense prestige of its private cultural and educational offerings and the centrality of the English language, it is freed from depending on explicit policy approaches to the same extent as other countries.

Before the first Trump administration, American ECP focused on two goals—and thus two world regions—in particular: combating violent extremism, especially in the Muslim world, and containing the growing Russian influence in Europe and Central Asia. Today, China is seen as the main ideological opponent, and US outreach to the Global South (which has become especially difficult after the 2023 outbreak of the Hamas-Israel war) seeks to counter Chinese appeal.

The MAGA movement may change this, however. The US far-right seeks a dual ECP strategy of cutting some agencies and explicitly instrumentalizing others. Following a longstanding Republican goal, Project 2025 (which offers a likely policy blueprint for a second Trump administration) argues for the complete defunding of the US Corporation for Public Broadcasting (Namdar, 2023, p. 235). It advocates for this due to perceived political bias but does not mention the potential knock-on reputation effects for the US abroad.

In the context of global media, Project 2025 does not wish to abolish the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM) entirely, but rather seeks to streamline and instrumentalize it for geopolitical ends. In a chapter dedicated entirely to the organization, the document claims that "clear lines of command and communications between the USAGM and an appropriate office of the National Security Council are sorely lacking" (Namdar, 2023, p. 244). The piece elaborates to say that President Trump's efforts at greater political control were admirable, but incompletely

implemented and argues that USAGM must focus on countering anti-American narratives abroad.

This squares with the broader approach to ECP found in the Project 2025 document[2]. For example, the chapter on the State Department argues for "powerful public diplomacy efforts to counter Chinese influence campaigns" (Skinner, 2023, p. 186). On international education, the policy follows a broader approach to restricting immigration, stating that the US should "eliminate or significantly reduce the number of visas issued to foreign students from enemy nations" (Cuccinelli, 2023, p. 141).

Due to the nature of the US political system, it is likely that a number of these policies could be enacted after Trump re-assumes the presidency in January 2025. Many of these decisions fall under the remit of the Executive Branch, so would not require any act of Congress, and are therefore much more likely to be implemented. Aside from specific policies, however, we can discern a much bigger trend toward the wholesale instrumentalization of ECP in US politics, especially on the right. Regardless of whether the specifics of Project 2025 are implemented, the desire to use external cultural policies for openly geopolitical ends is likely to be a growing trend in US politics.

2.7. China

China's one-party system does not allow for whatever challenge might arise from some type of nationalist opposition in Western countries. Nonetheless, the influence of nationalism on ECP has been just as consequential, if not more, in the People's Republic as it has been in Europe and North America. Although Chinese culture has long been tied to Chinese nationalism, this has become increasingly pronounced under President Xi Jinping, who has used notions of historical injury and civilizational greatness to position China's ECP narrative (Lin, 2024; Zheng, 2019).

Because China's ECP has evolved with the country's rapid economic ascent, China's ECP is characterized more by the clear link to its commercial, educational and scientific geopolitical interests. China has tried to forge an international cultural profile on par with its economic and commercial rise. Indeed, shortly after the turn of the millennium, China retooled its ECP strategy and began to invest larger sums, expanding its foreign cultural institutions, educational policy, and foreign media outreach. An obvious shift in political narratives is observed from Mao Zedong's 'Peaceful Coexistence' and Hu Jintao's 'Harmonious World' to Xi's 'Chinese Dream', which marks a more active and assertive turn in shaping the global perception of China (Yang, 2023).

China's economic rise, and the corresponding increase in ECP activities, has raised concerns among Western countries—making the growing strength of nationalism in both the West and China mutually reinforcing, particularly between China and the United States. For example, Western media often refers to a "Chinese threat" (Mahbubani, 2019), a trend that only intensified with the COVID-19 pandemic and Trump's insistence on calling it the "China

[2] For the full webpage on Project 2025, see: https://www.project2025.org/. Individual chapters are subsequently cited in this report by author name.

virus". Some countries in the West have recategorized certain ECP instruments used by China like the Confucius Institutes as 'sharp power', understood in this sense as instruments or activities by which authoritarian states like China and Russia project their influence through manipulation and censorship (Walker & Ludwig, 2017).

Despite China's falling prestige and soft power in much of the West, many of China's strategic partners, especially those from the Global South, still look up to China and see it as a development model for their countries. At the international level, China projects a 'peaceful rise' to global leadership and has sought to gain legitimacy through megaprojects like the Belt and Road Initiative, and Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and its summit meetings.[3] The Forum, largely about economic cooperation, combines commercial as well as geopolitical interests with soft power activities.

At the domestic level, Chinese soft power abroad is seen as a shield against Western influence and 'intrusion' at home (Yang, 2023). In other words, promoting soft power internationally is intended to also increase national cohesion through a domestic discourse reflected in the media as to how well regarded and respected China has become as a world power. This link between soft power and domestic cohesion has only become more pronounced as Xi has harnessed—and promoted—Chinese nationalism.

This dynamic is also visible in changing institutional arrangements. In 2018, China further centralized decision-making in foreign affairs and redesignated the Central Foreign Affairs Leading Group as the Central Foreign Affairs Commission whose power structure is not found within the central government but under the direct leadership of President Xi. The reform also placed important international broadcasters, China Global Television Network (CGTN) and China Radio International (CRI), under the direct supervision of the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party, further blurring the line between the international and the domestic.

While this trend towards greater centralization and control may streamline China's ECP, it could also worsen fears of a propagandistic approach, ultimately weakening its appeal internationally. China's dilemma here highlights a core tension of ECP when it is instrumentalized for nationalistic political reasons. Will its narrative and ideological messages be accepted by intended audiences? Or, in the words of Joseph Nye: "the best propaganda is not propaganda" (Nye, 2009).

2.8. Russia

A fixture of the far-right movement in Russia and abroad, Putin and his autocratic regime are often credited as propulsors of neo-nationalist movements across the globe. This is seen most strongly in Europe, where far-right politicians that sympathize with the Russian regime have been growing in influence (Rij, 2024). Hungary's Viktor Orbán or Germany's AfD and BSW, of which large swaths are pro-Putin, are prime examples of this expansion. Putin's particular brand of nationalism rests heavily on ultra-conservative policies, heavy-handed imperialism, and

[3] For further information, see: http://www.focac.org/eng/ and https://2024focacsummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/.

strong politicization of religion, namely the Russian Orthodox Church. Traditional family values, a reoccurring theme in Putin's campaign, provide a way to legitimize several controversial stances and stamp out potential dissidents (Luchenko, 2024). Feminists and the LGBTQIA+ population are often the main targets of ultraconservative derision. The once existing space for civil society has been closed: activists are imprisoned, and civil society organizations are branded as foreign agents and shut down. Any dissenting political or cultural expression against the regime's values may be deemed "anti-Christian propaganda," brandmarked as amoral "Western decadence" and met with repression.

Russia's ECP possess four major goals (Yang, 2024, p. 3): promote the "Russian world" concept of Russia's centrality to the heritage of Eastern Europe and Central Asia; support Russian communities abroad; promote traditional values such as faith and family; and increase cooperation in education and sciences. A key ECP actor is the Russkiy Mir Foundation, Russia's platform for cultural and humanitarian cooperation. There are Russkiy Mir centres and cabinets spread around the world, however, many were shut down after Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. For example, in Europe alone, the number of Russiky Mir centers dwindled from 52 to only 34 between 2019 and 2022 (ibid, 2024, p. 7). As such, Russia's high degree of bellicosity has squandered its soft power reserves in most Global North countries. Western powers responded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine with bans and sanctions on Russian presence worldwide, most prominently in the EU. The Russian Federation, a historical powerhouse in the world of sports and athletics, saw itself outcast from the 2024 Paris Olympics, for example. Participation in scientific exchange and the international research community has also been strained. These are only but two examples of Russia's waning soft power on the global stage, symptomatic of a larger breakdown of Russian diplomacy.

While diplomatic relations with many key world powers may be frayed, Russia asserts a long-lasting influence on what it calls the "near abroad", i.e. new independent countries, formerly under Soviet rule. As an example, Russian higher education institutes operate heavily in the post-Soviet space, with over 89% of foreign students coming from CIS nations[4] (Arefiev, 2019, as cited in Yang, 2024). The Russian regime is heavily imperialist, seeking to suppress independent cultures both within its borders—such as ethnic minorities and indigenous populations—and beyond them—such as the ongoing conflict waged on Ukrainian soil (Dullin, 2023).

However, a broader shift in Russia's foreign relations strategy is forming. Instead of attempting to court those staunchly opposed to the Russian political model and foreign policy stance, the Putin regime has fostered bilateral cooperation which has drawn major alliances (economic, political, cultural, scientific) with fellow BRICS leaders in China and India, both nationalists in their own right. The 2022 decree known as the "Concept of Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad" cemented this refocusing of priorities (Yang, 2024). It can also be argued that Russia attempts to make up for its damaged ECP by interfering in foreign affairs through other means, particularly in Western countries. The use of bots and social media trolls to influence public opinion and shape elections in other countries has been attributed to the Kremlin (ibid, 2024; Chen, 2015).

[4] The "Commonwealth of Independent States" is a supranational organization associated with Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Turkmenistan.

This ECP strategy of forging ever-stronger ties with like-minded nationalist allies will likely remain as Putin's regime continues. The strains of the 2022 invasion on Ukraine, which have consumed military, financial and reputational resources, creates an even greater need for allyship. Bans and sanctions have brought its soft power momentum to a grinding halt in most Western liberal societies, especially the EU and the United Kingdom, which either voluntarily or involuntarily closed many of its cultural institutes in Russia. Russia's use of hard power and its bellicose tendencies may distract from its fading influence, as visions of imperial grandeur grow distant in an increasingly multipolar world. Allies that legitimize this bellicosity are increasingly important, so it is expected that Russia's ECP will follow these needs.

2.9. Turkey

Turkey's complex politics has fostered several neo-nationalist movements over time. The National Parliament is currently dominated by the People's Alliance, an alliance between President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or AKP), a right-wing populist party in power since 2002, and the far-right extremist Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* or MHP), associated with the violent, neo-fascist youth group known as *Bozkurtlar* (Grey Wolves) (BfV, n.d.). Schisms and conflicting interests have led to factions splintering off from the main parties and establishing other movements intensifying the neo-nationalist narrative. The ultranationalist Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi* or ZP) is an example of this, having itself split off the Good Party (İYİ Party) which, together with the larger Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* or CHP), integrates the main opposition front (Nation Alliance). Despite not winning seats in the 2023 elections, the ZP has been a loud voice in the political sphere, capitalizing on anti-immigration sentiments and general economic anxiety to stir up public debate (Karsit, 2024).

Turkish nationalism has various expressions that mainly grow out of different interpretations of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's legacy, what Hoffman et al. (2018) calls "the central point of reference for all political parties". However, the distinct political movements often prop up or disregard different elements of this legacy. In the ruling AKP, for example, neo-Ottomanist tendencies toward dreams of greater influence in the Middle East are more prevalent, however an appeal to religious conservatism opposes Atatürk's principles of secularity (Yeşilada, 2023). Authoritarian elements of the regime also provide evidence for democratic backsliding. The AKP's political marriage to the extremist MHP can be seen as a form of new nationalism, a response to growing socio-economic unrest that seeks to unite religious conservatives and Turkish nationalists by reaffirming Turkey's cultural identity (Hoffman et al., 2018).

The current ECP approach taken by Turkey is centralized and statist, with the preservation of national identity and heritage among the main priorities (Knudsen, 2021a). Many ministries are involved in the implementation of this ECP strategy, directly organizing cultural programs abroad. Turkey places heavy emphasis on engagement with other countries that possess Turkic populations, such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan (ibid, 2021). Occupying a strategic geographical position between Europe and Asia, Turkey has some soft power assets at its disposal (e.g., the popularity of Turkish cultural products like soap operas and its general favorable reputation in Islamic countries) but lacks a coherent and sustained ECP

approach to capitalize on such advantages. Its turn towards authoritarianism and attempts to instrumentalize Turkish communities in electoral campaigns has also diminished its soft power in Western liberal societies.

The successful alliance between the AKP and the MHP will likely signal a movement towards greater expressions of Turkish nationalism by the ruling party. President Erdoğan's regime has often been accused of fostering religious conservatism against the principles of secularism (Kirby, 2023). An example of this is the increased significance of the Diyanet (Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs) which not only manages religious matters within the country, but also has significant physical assets abroad, most notably a large network of mosques (Knudsen, 2021a). However, MHP's proposal for ECP amps up the ante of the Turkish identity. A statement on its main portal lays out the main principle of its foreign relations "unity in language, idea and work" (MHP, n.d.) with communities that it shares historical and ethnic ties with. It places great emphasis on preservation of heritage and Turkish identity, highlighting that expressions of "cultural values disturbance" will be suppressed. Relationships to ethnic minorities such as the Kurds are complex and fraught with longstanding tensions; the Kurdish conservative 'Free Cause Party' is an official supporter of the People's Alliance (Aydın, 2023), despite MHP being associated with attacks on the Kurdish people in the past.

Turkey's ECP is inextricably linked and subjugated to its far-right government. The existence of competent ECP operators in the first place are a direct product of the current regime—take President Erdoğan's establishment of the Yunus Emre Cultural Center by direct decree in 2007, for example. It manages cultural institutes in over 48 countries and is essentially the backbone of Turkey's ECP operations abroad (Knudsen, 2021a). Another relevant entity is the TRT World, Turkey's English-language public broadcaster, which has been accused of being a mouthpiece for the Erdoğan regime (Stalinsky, 2019). Turkey ranks low on the World Press Freedom Index, at 158 out of 180 countries (Freedom House, 2024). Freedom House (2024) also notes that MHP politicians have incited attacks and violence towards journalists. Moving forward, the programming and activities of ECP activities are expected to reflect the government's growing nationalist and authoritarian tendencies.

3. Comparison and Implications

The countries reviewed in the previous section offer different scenarios of what nationalism would mean for ECP: in China, Russia and Turkey, the nationalists are in power and exert immense influence on ECP. In Italy, the nationalist government is at the beginning of a process towards greater control of cultural policy generally. In the case of France, there is a strong nationalist party in waiting, which, like in the Italian case, would seek greater control of both narrative and institutions. In Poland, there was a shift away from nationalism, but the new government faces challenges in reversing the damage done to the country's cultural institutions. In Germany and the UK, it is more the incorporation of nationalist ideas by the political mainstream rather than a nationalist conquest of power that could mean changes for ECP.

In Germany, the governance structure of ECP based on the arm's length principle and the multitude of public and private actors involved—a source of frequent frustration in 'normal' times given chronic coordination challenges—turns out to be a source of resilience against political extremists. Even if mainstream political parties manage to abstain from importing AfD and BSW ideologies into their own programs, Germany's ECP may face difficulties continuing in its current path given budget constraints combined with requests for more strategic purpose and the streamlining of programs. Some streamlining could be thinly veiled threats to cut activities seen as too controversial by some stakeholders. However, should a future government incorporate messages and demands of right- and left-wing nationalists for political reasons, changes may well be more profound and far-reaching.

Whereas in Germany the danger of a nationalist federal government is unlikely for the time being, the odds are quite different in France. While the *Alliance Française* enjoys some political independence, there is less of an institutional buffer and fewer actors and veto players involved. Under a RN government, heritage preservation and national identity will be a domestic focus, and internationally a strengthening of French national interest especially within the Francophonie and the EU.

The neo-nationalists are already in power in Italy, and so far, the culture wars have focused on domestic matters. Internationally, the Meloni government has shown restraint and been mindful of the EU's watchful eye. Neo-nationalists, however, are opportunists, and it could be just a matter of time before Meloni's administration will instrumentalize ECP to advance her neo-fascist agenda abroad to present Italian culture and heritage, ultimately to advance its national interests in the EU and beyond. The previous experience of Poland offers some clues as to the risks—but also the opportunities for resilience—of advancing a nationalist ECP agenda.

By contrast, in the UK, it is unlikely that the neo-nationalists will be able to form or be part of the government any time soon, especially after the Tory defeat in the 2024 elections. Yet, as in the past, they can still influence British ECP through both pressure on mainstream parties and their ability to influence the UK's international image, but overall, the mostly commercial policy stance will prevail, perhaps with an attempt to mend the strained relationship with other European countries after a bruising Brexit.

While in the US, the Biden administration has in fact expanded a neo-mercantilist trade agenda that began under Trump's first term, and while it has reversed some of the Trump isolationist and racist policies (such as banning people from some Islamic countries from visiting the US), these could be reinstated by executive order. Project 2025 signals a much more systematic approach to instrumentalize ECP for openly geopolitical ends, much of it directed at China. ECP will become power politics.

China's highly centralized ECP, combined with extensive internal and external surveillance technologies, are aimed at maintaining domestic political control and gaining international influence. This dual instrumentalization can easily lead to tensions abroad and lessen rather than strengthen China's soft power appeal in other countries. In contrast to Russia, China is a rising power and less bellicose, tying its ECP close to economic interests, whereas the former links ECP to hard power and manipulation as part of hybrid warfare. Finally, Turkey presents yet a different case, as its motives are largely political in trying to establish itself as a regional power, but it shares with the other two autocratic nationalist states a vision of past grandeur that seeks recognition in the present.

In summary, there are cases of autocratic nationalist regimes that have succeeded in a full instrumentalization of ECP: for political and economic reasons in China, for political militarist causes in Russia, and largely political aims in Turkey. Then there is a high danger of instrumentalization of ECP in the case of the US as well as in France, should Le Pen come to power. Italy, too, shares that risk but due to its weaker position both geopolitically and within the EU, it must tread more carefully. The UK reveals what could be called a benign instrumentalization largely for commercial reasons and in an attempt to position itself post Brexit. With Germany, it shares a relatively resilient governance structure, and both stand the least danger of having their ECP controlled by neo-nationalists.

4. A Closer Look at Germany

There is a stark contrast between the broad continuity of the ECP narrative of successive German governments (including the "traffic light" coalition) and two rising populist nationalist parties—the right-wing AfD and the left-wing BSW. Both are relatively new but have rapidly risen to prominence and now collectively command around a quarter of the popular vote nationally, and nearly half in some Eastern states.

For the German government, ECP is the tool for achieving positive relationships with other countries, even when political relations are strained. For example, the Foreign Office webpage (Auswärtiges Amt, 2021) states that:

> *"access to culture and education across geographical, political and social borders and thus creating mutual understanding: [is] the basis for good international relations. In this way, foreign cultural and educational policy also wants to contribute to defusing or even preventing crises and conflicts around the world: it is about staying in dialogue, continuing to have a common ground. It brings together actors from civil society, advocates for the freedom of art and science worldwide, maintains spaces for critical exchange and freedom of expression, and protects cultural assets as symbols of cultural identity."*

It is an ECP of societies, the website declares, meaning that ECP it not primarily a matter of and for governments and rather a matter of arms-length institutions and private actors such as foundations and NGOs as well. This understanding moves ECP away from politics and power in a narrow sense and into what the Foreign Office refers to as "pre-political space."

Compare this to the AfD's ECP stance published in a position paper[5] which sees German cultural identity

> *"now threatened in many ways: for example, by left-wing ideological attempts to establish a politically correct, feminist or 'queer' language regime in Germany; by the attempt to only allow simplistic views of our past, such as that of post-colonialism; or by the attempt – out of concern about being misunderstood due to the problematic aspects of our history – to take refuge in art and literature that is seen as 'cosmopolitan' and that consciously neglects or even denies its own traditions" (page 9).*

The position paper quotes its honorary chairman and member of Parliament, Alexander Gauland:

> *'The identity of a people is essentially linked to its language and its culture. In this respect, the Goethe Institutes are consulates of German identity abroad. We want a positive identity to be conveyed there. German musicians, poets, researchers and thinkers enjoy an excellent reputation worldwide, and German culture is one of the greatest creations of humanity. Great books have been written and the deepest*

[5] See AfD, 2024. The following quotes are from this position paper, and the authors' own translation.

> *thoughts have been thought in our language. This important tradition must be continued and defended against the current attacks of 'wokeness' - especially in the Goethe Institutes' (page 11).*

Petr Bystron, Member of Parliament for the AfD, is equally outspoken:

> *'The financially and politically important subcommittee on foreign cultural and educational policy must be reformed. This committee should once again work for what it was founded for: promoting the German language and German culture abroad. The export of left-wing green ideologies and absurd fantasies of an otherness that nobody wants are not part of this. The world expects us to bring our great cultural history to the world – and not to try to force twisted ideologies on it under the guise of promoting culture' (page 22).*

The BSW is still in formation and does not yet have a detailed position paper on ECP. Its program, however, suggest a policy stance that is very critical and equally firm in its rejection of current German foreign policy:[6]

> *"A military alliance whose leading power[7] has invaded five countries in recent years in violation of international law and killed more than 1 million people in these wars is fueling feelings of threat and defensive reactions, thus contributing to global instability. Instead of an instrument of power for geopolitical goals, we need a defensive alliance that respects the principles of the UN Charter, strives for disarmament instead of committing to rearmament, and in which members meet on an equal footing. Europe needs a stable security architecture that should also include Russia in the longer term."*

The program statement envisions Germany as a sovereign nation state following its own interests in a multipolar world:

> *"Our country deserves a self-confident policy that focuses on the well-being of its citizens and is based on the insight that US interests differ considerably from our own. Our goal is an independent Europe of sovereign democracies in a multipolar world, not a new bloc confrontation in which Europe is crushed between the USA and the increasingly self-confident new power bloc around China and Russia."*

For decades, Germany's external cultural policy (ECP) was characterized by continuity and a consensus that rested on advancing international understanding and cooperation. Both assumptions are now challenged by serious shifts in domestic and international politics that are putting increasing pressure on longstanding narratives, priorities, content and activities. Domestically, the AfD and the BSW call for an ECP with a greater emphasis on the national interest. While they have not yet seized power and are unlikely to do so at the federal level, their rising electoral strength nonetheless means that ECP institutions must be prepared for greater nationalist pressure in the coming years.

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[6] See Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht, n.d. The following quotes are the authors' own translation.
[7] The reference here is to NATO and the United States.

4.1. Implications

What would be the implications of nationalism for the future of Germany's ECP—especially if nationalist parties gain more influence indirectly or assume direct positions of power? Politically, domestic so-called 'culture wars' about racial, ethnic, national, cultural and sexual identity may find their way into international cultural relations and soft power rationales. ECP would be increasingly subject to right-wing attacks on the notion of Germany as a multicultural society on the one hand, and left-wing attacks about ECP's alleged Russia-phobia on the other. Vice versa, conflicts from abroad already spilling into domestic arenas, like the Turkish-Kurdish or the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, will be instrumentalized for domestic purposes.

Domestically, it is a tension-ridden scenario whereby some population groups—often in precarious economic positions, feeling disadvantaged and threatened in their own identity by the 'other'—are enticed by nationalists from home and abroad. This can create a cycle of reaction and counter-reaction of mutual estrangement that could potentially unfold in hundreds of towns and regions across Europe. It is an estrangement cycle, long ignored by political elite, and now easily instrumentalized by nationalists. For example, Turkish communities in Germany could be caught between an AfD that ideally wants to repatriate them on the one hand, and, on the other, a nationalist Erdoğan policies that seeks to instrumentalize them for political gain. Russian, Syrian, Iranian or Afghan communities in Germany could suffer similar fates.

With the growing use of ECP by autocracies, cultural relations would be increasingly caught in geopolitical competition and conflicts. No longer the province of mutual understanding, ECP that previously aimed at cooperation and positive sum outcomes would become more tied to hard and sharp power considerations. While soft power, like any other type of power, can be 'good' by furthering international peace and understanding, it can also be 'bad' in the sense of advancing nationalist, anti-democratic, and racist agendas or being part of hybrid warfare.

There are two dynamics that show the distinct ways in which ECP may become more important in a world of increasingly contentious geopolitics. First, there are expansive autocracies like China, Russia or Turkey that vehemently seek to advance their own national interests to gain influence abroad. They implement cultural policies strategically and often with considerable resources, whereby soft power approaches are in combination with sharp power (e.g., China's Belt and Road Initiative; Confucius Institutes) and hybrid hard power (e.g., Russian disinformation campaigns and declaring EU-based cultural institutions operating in Russia as "foreign agents"; Turkey nurturing echo chambers in Germany and limiting access to German language schools in Turkey).

Second, there is the issue of control of communication and information infrastructure. Autocracies find this easier than democracies, as shown by China's control of the Internet by the Cyberspace Administration of China and attempts to establish a rival version of the Internet, the Digital Silk Road initiative. Russia's Internet, too, is controlled with elaborate surveillance mechanisms. In contrast, unlike in the past, today even the poorest and deprived communities

in the world have access to the Internet and instant communication—and can therefore be influenced.

For democracies, these communication flows combined with disinformation campaigns fielded by countries like Russia and Iran, nationalist parties, as well as disloyal and semi-loyal opposition groups, amount to a massive problem for domestic stability in Europe. Cases in point are the uprisings in England and Northern Ireland in July 2024, the recruitment of migrants in Germany by the Islamic States for terrorist action in August 2024, or the use of doppelgänger internet sites of leading Western media by Russia to spread misinformation. At the same time, the significant and largely uncontrolled influence of social media platforms such as X or Telegram add a worrying element to global media contests, magnified by the rapidly growing use of artificial intelligence.

There is a tendency that ECP is becoming less about dialogue and more about gaining either political or commercial inroads abroad. At their core, they threaten to become camouflaged political or commercial agendas. In other words, ECP is likely to be more about geopolitical positioning and power. The basic aim is to make the country appear strong, united, and appealing. It is less about what we can learn from each other in the sense of mutual understanding and advancing a common cause, but more about gaining national advantage.

4.2. Recommendations

Given these troubling developments, what can liberal democracies like Germany do to safeguard their ECP from both the domestic and international impact of rising nationalism? The biggest mistake would be a "do nothing" approach that concentrates on narrow debates about budgets and short-term fixes while shying away from the real strategic and programmatic challenges. We propose five recommendations that, while tailored to Germany specifically, are applicable to other democratic countries in slightly altered institutional form.

1. Support and strengthen the arm's-length principle of key institutions

With the rise of nationalism threatening long-established norms of ECP, the importance of insulating them from the potential impact of nationalist politicians has never been greater. Countries like Germany currently are big proponents of the arm's length principle for major institutions like the Goethe-Institut, the DAAD or Deutsche Welle, but this must be further reinforced and reaffirmed, especially ahead of the 2025 federal elections. We recommend that the cultural intermediaries of Germany's ECP review their constitutions, articles of association or incorporation, relevant laws and decrees as well as framework agreements and governance structure as to identify any 'weak spots' that could serve as entry points for the intrusion and leveraging of nationalists and national policies. The aim would be the future-proof of current institutional and governance arrangements against nationalist infiltration and aspirations of control, even takeover.

2. Improve coordination between ECP institutions

ECP institutions must strengthen their connection with each other and build a common line of defense, coming to each other's help when needed. For example, an AfD attack on the Goethe-Institut is an attack on all intermediaries and should lead to collective action, as should a BSW campaign for Putin-friendly policies. Intermediaries should prepare for such attacks and have appropriate responses ready. Moreover, greater and deeper cooperation is needed at the European level. If an alliance such as the EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) can be strengthened, it will help protect the overall integrity of cooperative and liberal ECP approaches—even if any one country succumbs to nationalist forces. For example, if one European country has its ECP transformed by a takeover of nationalists, but the others are all united around a common approach, then the impact of the nationalist country can be limited and perhaps even 'quarantined'. EUNIC could also serve as a conduit to encourage cross-learning and share experiences of how to respond to nationalist challenges, for example the strategies and activities Polish, Hungarian or Slovak cultural institutions pursued or are perusing in that regard. Therefore, we recommend expanding the institutional capacity of EUNIC and similar alliances.

3. Shield against malign outside interference

In addition to protecting from domestic nationalist forces, liberal democracies must be prepared to shield their democracies from the impact of nationalist ECP from other countries. This includes potential Russian disinformation, Chinese espionage, Turkey's support for nationalist currents among its diaspora, or illiberal European countries undermining democratic norms and values, like Hungary, Serbia or Slovakia. Currently, the governance and administrative structure of Germany and other European countries seem ill-equipped to manage these threats and profound changes that are taking place domestically and internationally. This partially reflects the fact that the government continues to operate along inflexible, siloed ministerial structures and agencies, leading to perennial information asymmetries and coordination problems. Accordingly, there is a growing mismatch between problem configurations and governance structures. We should recall that Germany has no national security council which could serve in that function. As a second-best solution, in the realm of ECP, improvements could come via a high-level coordination group that brings key stakeholders together to set focus on the nationalist threat. At the European level, we suggest exploring the ECP equivalent to the Permanent Structured Cooperation or PESCO in the security and defense field.

4. Create and communicate anti-nationalist narratives

Forceful and convincing narratives must be directed at both domestic and external nationalist forces and should be coordinated across institutions. On the domestic front, ECP institutions must tread lightly by focusing on promoting their core values without seeming excessively partisan, but nonetheless assertively (see first recommendation above). This is because nationalist forces thrive on narratives of 'the system' being against them, basking in their alleged victim role and being prone to conspiracy theories. Internationally, the narrative can be more assertive, communicating a message of democracy, prosperity and the benefits of cooperation while highlighting the forces that threaten to disrupt it. We recommend a PR-like development

of such narratives, followed by a massive PR campaign (a 'charm offensive', so to speak), that communicates the German narrative (or European narrative for that matter) in an appealing, catchy and memorable form. That would include engaging with new media and networks, too. The far-right has both experiences and capacities of power in that field, i.e. the AfD's success on the social media platform TikTok, and propagation of fake news by Russia. A sustained, large-scale PR campaign is to counteract their influence.

5. Build on existing strengths and use opportunities

Germany's ECP has a long and proud track record. It should build on that record and proactively take advantage of new opportunities as they emerge. A future ECP could work on the principle of "networked cooperation" by involving other European and local partners whenever possible, creating common umbrellas for programs, increasing the number of joint locations and co-habitations, and, when strategically called for, linking to existing EU, Council of Europe or UNESCO programs.

For example: in the field of arts and culture, involve local groups and artists whenever possible as part of enlarged exchange programs in a sustained way to build trusted relationships and alliances; in primary and secondary education, Germany should not only invest more in school partnerships but explore a European-wide network of schools with multiple language offerings and tracks, perhaps building on the European School system run by the EU;[8] in science diplomacy, avoid a zero-sum logic of competition for talent, work with partners in shared scientific initiatives, and strengthen integration of ECP in programs such as Horizon Europe; or, finally, in the field of media, join forces and explore cooperative arrangements among ECP institutions with initiatives like the Democracy News Alliance,[9] a joint project of seven leading press agencies in the Global North to improve reporting on democracy worldwide.

[8] See more on the corresponding website: https://www.eursc.eu/en

[9] For more, see: https://mediaconnect.com/democracy-news-alliance-dna?lang=en.

5. Conclusion

Nationalism is on the rise in many countries, including Germany, its allies, competitors and adversaries. A more complex and conflict-prone system of international relations has emerged that poses serious questions as to the future role of soft power and ECP. The future of ECP will take place in an international environment that is more zero-sum than positive-sum in its underlying approach, and more competitive than cooperative in the context of system rivalry. However, the domestic threat posed by nationalism new and old to ECP varies across countries. It is more acute in France and Italy than in the United Kingdom and Germany. The case of the United States is alarming, given Donald Trump's victory in the recent election. However, Poland offers an example of how countries can rebound from nationalist government. By contrast, nationalistic ECP in China, Russia and Turkey presents serious challenges to Germany and its partners.

We recommend that Germany, and by implications its partners, need to prepare for such a challenging scenario by future-proofing legal bases and governance systems against nationalist intrusion; improving coordination among intermediaries and major actors in the field, both domestically and within the EU; building defense mechanisms against malign influences from abroad; creating and communicating a narrative of success and prosperity; and systematically building on given programmatic strengths and pro-actively taking advantage of new opportunities.

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Appendix: Event Proceedings

Navigating new nationalisms: A new direction for international cultural relations?

The event to present and debate the report on "Navigating new nationalisms: A new direction for international cultural relations?" took place at the Hertie School on October 30th, 2024. Following a presentation of the report by Prof. Helmut K. Anheier, former *Deutschlandfunk* journalist and moderator of the panel discussion, Annette Riedel, introduced the evening's panelists. These included Prof. Arjun Appadurai (Professor Emeritus, Hertie School & New York University and Visiting Professor, Humboldt University); Gitte Zschoch (General Secretary of ifa – Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen); Dr. habil. Elsa Tulmets (Researcher at the Centre Marc Bloch, Humboldt University and European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)); and Hanna Radziejowska (Director of the Pilecki Institute/Instytut Pileckiego in Berlin). Following the panel discussion and questions from the audience, Hagen Schulz-Forberg (University of Aarhus), offered closing comments.

The full livestream recording of this event can be accessed online.[10]

Summary of the Panel Discussion

Annette Riedel opened the discussion by asking each of the panelists to reflect on the growing influence of nationalism on the external cultural policy (ECP) of their respective countries. Gitte Zschoch highlighted that Germany is in a different situation than countries such as Italy, given its arm's-length approach to ECP, which affords intermediary organizations significant autonomy. While this setup does not allow for the government to directly influence ifa or other intermediaries, Gitte Zschoch also noted that ifa operates within the discourses present in Germany. For example, the growing influence of nationalism can be felt through "cultural wars". She gave two examples of ifa's experience with this phenomenon: the dialogue portal Qantara[11] and the 2024 edition of the German Pavillion at the Biennale di Venezia[12]. „There is currently a closer look at platforms that engage in cultural exchange," and the intense discourse surrounding institutions' work contributes to creating a feeling of insecurity in institutions. "We are currently building resilience", Gitte Zschoch said. Speaking of France's relationship to nationalism, Elsa Tulmets said that the lessons of the past are still present in France today, especially in the south and southwest regions. She highlighted that the nationalist discourse has created important counter-voices as well.

In response to the question about the lasting effects of the two PiS governments on Poland`s domestic and external cultural policy, Hanna Radziejowska stated that the nationalism present in Poland is not a 'new' form of nationalism—it is old nationalism, and, in the case of Russia, simply imperialism. She argued strongly that soft power solutions are applicable in times of

[10] https://www.youtube.com/live/26DghFmcEiQ
[11] https://www.ifa.de/pressemitteilung/das-ifa-setzt-ab-1-juli-2024-die-dialogplattform-qantara-de-um/
[12] https://www.ifa.de/en/art/german-pavilion-venice-biennale/

peace, but lose influence in times of war, as is currently the case in Ukraine and Russia. Hanna Radziejowska stressed that aiding Ukraine is essential to protecting democracy in Europe.

Arjun Appadurai offered a contrasting look at nationalist movements outside of Europe. He brought attention to India, the largest country in the world by population size, and how its democracy is being eroded by Hindu nationalism. He highlighted how culture is such a crucial factor in the world today that the concept of soft power may not capture all of its importance, as culture also influences media, communications, and information. "Culture is about the way the nature of the world is seen in different places, the way information is managed, the way opinion is created, the way the public sphere is structured," he noted. He reaffirmed the importance of culture, as it is "the place where the great global issues of today are solved and resolved, or lost and abandoned".

Moderator Annette Riedel then turned towards the relationship between artists and nationalists, in that she hypothesized, that when autocrats or nationalists fear the creativity and "unruliness" of artists and people working in cultural institutions, they are likely correct to assume that people in the cultural sector and art world are anti-nationalists. She asked to the panelists, how do ECP actors, then, maintain relationships with artists and cultural actors without coming across as supporting the opposition, or "mingling with politics"? To avoid falling into propaganda, Elsa Tulmets offered a solution she found through discussions with her students, which is to let each person express themselves as an artist—and the diversity itself will create the necessary counterbalance elements.

Gitte Zschoch disagreed with the thesis presented by Annette Riedel's question, stating that ifa works with artists and civil society, not with politics. In other words, they operate in the pre-political space and are not a political actor; that is an important aspect of an arm's length organization. In many countries with autocratic regimes, there has always been a discrepancy in values on what is happening in the political field and what organizations like ifa are doing. These countries are on the rise while ECP operators navigate carefully in order to create and maintain safer spaces.

Annette Riedel posited that image campaigns done by one country can look like propaganda from the point of view of a different one, and vice versa. In response, Hanna Radziejowska recalled cultural relations between Dresden and Moscow[13] as an example of soft power wielded by an autocratic state. She also stated that the lack of inclusion of Central and Eastern European cultures—including Polish, Ukrainian, Belarussian, Baltic—in the wider European discourse is an issue of (neo)colonialism. "We need to decolonize ourselves, recognize the subjectivity of the different countries [in Eastern Europe]," she emphasized.

[13] Dresden (where Putin was stationed as a KGB officer in the final years of the Soviet Union) and Moscow had longstanding cultural relations. Some examples include the recognition of Putin for his contributions to the cultural exchanges between the state of Saxony and Russia in 2009 (https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/putin-in-dresden-eine-nacht-mit-dem-heiligen-georg-1751682.html, retrieved on 4 November 2024) or a mutual exhibition on romanticism in both cities in 2021 (see: *Romantik-Ausstellung in Moskau und Dresden – ein Höhepunkt kultureller Zusammenarbeit* https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/service/laender/russischefoederation-node/romatik-ausstellung/2487208, retrieved on 4 November 2024).

Building on the topic proposed by Annette Riedel, Arjun Appadurai suggested a deep rethinking of the idea of culture itself: "culture is certainly partly about the past, history, tradition, memory, habit... but it is also about the future. Every society has a vision of the future." He further stated, "If we begin to think habitually about culture from the point of view of the future, we take the ground out of the nationalist approach to culture," which, he reminded, is cemented in visions of the past. This shift in perspective could create new terrain for dialogue among different cultures. Artists play an important role in this new configuration, as artists imagine and create new things and hence work with possibilities.

Bringing the panel discussions to a close, Annette Riedel asked the panelists to reflect upon the recommendations offered in the report for improving ECP resilience. Specifically, she highlighted the recommendation to "improve coordination between institutions of external cultural relations" and asked what the limit should be to protecting these institutions. For example, would a procedure similar to the "Article V" of the NATO doctrine[14] be applicable? In other words, would an attack on one cultural institution be understood as an attack on all of them? Gitte Zschoch stated that a procedure is not required; instead, spaces for dialogue were needed. Gitte Zschoch also added a recommendation: institutions should learn from each other—for example, learn from Polish cultural institutions that had first-hand experiences with nationalist governments. Annette Riedel then brought up an incident from the 2024 Frankfurt Book Fair[15] as an example of solidarity between artists and a more combative approach to protecting cultural relations from nationalist influence.

Elsa Tulmets added that the coexistence of many different European identities makes it hard to think in nationalistic terms; European schools, such as Franco-German schools, are a way to promote this coexistence. Bilateral, trilateral, quadrilateral relations that already exist within the cultural field can be expanded upon.

Arjun Appadurai spoke about the importance of "seizing the narrative", so that far-right, anti-democratic forces worldwide do not dominate the narrative. To him, the value of 'fraternity' is essential to creating a dialogue between nations or different cultural policies. In response to narratives and cultural identity, Hanna Radziejowska recalled the situation in Belarus, where citizens were detained for expressing Belarussian identity by the Lukashenka regime.[16] She stressed again the importance of Ukrainian lives in the protection of European values.

The moderator then invited questions from the audience. In response to a question by Prof. Joanna Bryson of the Hertie School, Annette Riedel proposed that integration on a European level should not be viewed as giving up sovereignty, but as sharing sovereignty and thus gaining

[14] https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm#:~:text=Article%205%20provides%20that%20if,to%20assist%20the%20Ally%20attacked (Retrieved on 15 November 2024).

[15] The incident refers to influential author Roberto Saviano's absence from the lineup of Italian authors selected by the Italian delegation; given Saviano's intense critique of Prime Minister Meloni's government, many fellow authors perceived this as censorship and withdrew their participation in support of their colleague. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/oct/15/roberto-saviano-appear-frankfurt-book-fair-despite-italy-delegation-snub (Retrieved on 15 November 2024)

[16] https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/belarusian-sovereignty-and-identity-are-increasingly-under-threat
-says-eu-on-4th-anniversary-of-fraudulent-presidential-elections/

more influence on the international scene. In response to a student comment about balancing the need for globalization and not triggering the self-interest of nations, Arjun Appadurai said that the shift to the right has a lot to do with the aspiration gap. Dialogue should be the goal of every intercultural relation, but it is often used as a sedative. Dialogue should be on matters that are risky, not just soft topics. Gitte Zschoch highlighted ifa's CrossCulture Programme[17] and how resilience is important for them to continue to conduct this work.

Closing commentary

Hagen Schulz-Forberg offered the event's closing comments, which are presented in more detail in the next section. He pointed out that cultural policy is not about reading books and watching movies; it is about power and values, and using such power. The soft power of culture is power, nonetheless. Increasingly, and in many countries, ECP has become completely political, having blended with ideology, propaganda, and political agency. He also stressed that those behind new nationalisms are quite smart, with their visions, strategies, and solid funding. This allows them to undermine semantics and capture forward-moving emotions. The far-right is able to generate narratives that legitimize its illiberal actions, e.g., Russia seeking to legitimize its invasion of Ukraine through its constructed narrative. In this sense, the new form of nationalism is not only about the past; it is about marrying falsely constructed nostalgic narratives with a perceived sense of victimhood in order to create a vision of the future. In response, as the report suggests, cultural policy operators in liberal democracies have the urgent task to construct a competing and convincing narrative about the future.

[17] https://www.ifa.de/en/funding/crossculture-programme/

Closing Commentary: Nationalism and External Cultural Policy Today – Some Reflections

By Hagen Schulz-Forberg

Approaching the New Nationalisms

The hour is late. It's five minutes to midnight! — This may be the most frequently chosen metaphor to drive home the critical urgency of a situation and to call for action. Yet, reading the report prepared by Helmut Anheier and Edward Knudsen, and being aware of contemporary historical developments, another image may be more appropriate: that of a new landscape of politically rooted nationalisms, lit by a gloomy new morning—to which we arise from our beds too late. The clear victory for Donald Trump in early November 2024 adds to that feeling. Now, the most powerful nation in the world will follow a clear nationalist agenda (again), too. Critics of the US may say that it has always acted in its own interests and in imperial ways, but the return of Trump manifests the new nationalisms globally as a political phenomenon that has not only continuously grown over the last decades, but is here to stay. It is a nationalism that is often, though not in all cases, coupled with a populism based on a leading figure with authoritarian tendencies. The personalization of party politics is not a purely extreme right-wing development, however. The current left-leaning German political phenomenon, the *Bündnis Sarah Wagenknecht* (BSW), is a case in point.

Ever since at least Silvio Berlusconi in the 1990s, the political strategy of populist nationalists is to blame the system: an amorphous, ill-defined, yet seemingly established, very powerful 'deep state' run by an elite that shares the same mindset, attends the same universities, controls the media and cultural sphere in general, and ignores the 'real people', the 'normal people', and their traditional values. What is also part of it is the redefinition of core liberal concepts as driven by political interest and as exclusive to those who think differently, as being partisan despite their claims to bipartisanship, as acting in the service of the elite and their manipulation of the public sphere.

As nationalists embrace increasingly nativist interpretations of national identity, culture and diversity are redefined from their perspective, too. Culture becomes part of a narrative of national victimhood—claiming that the so-construed 'true culture' nation is threatened and about to be eroded by a detached, self-involved elite—and diversity is reinterpreted as exclusive rather than inclusive by nationalists. Those promoting cultural diversity in the liberal way are depicted as denying others their national identity and traditional values. Russia claims diversity, too, arguing that they need to protect themselves against outside expansionism and to thus save diversity on a global scale before the West turns the whole world into societies of its own image. Almost logically, policies of nationalist parties in government are anti-immigration and pro-family first and foremost, as was the case of the PiS government in Poland and as the first declaration of the new Dutch government stated earlier this year. They are pro national families, of course.

Where did this all begin? This remains a question with many answers. Importantly, however, it needs to be acknowledged that liberal triumphalism of the late twentieth century created a narrative denigrating nationalist and populist movements to weird, yet surely passing, political pariahs. Looking more soberly on the bigger picture, one also needs to acknowledge that today's nationalism and populism have roots in contemporary history that go back to at least the early 1990s, when Austria's Freedom Party and the Danish People's Party began to change their nations' vocabulary, when the French Front National began to appropriate the memory of Jeanne d'Arc and Marianne, the two main French national symbols; and when the president of AC Milan became the prime minister of Italy for the first time after the collapse of the established party system in the wake of the mani pulite investigations. Crucially, Berlusconi was then seen by many as something like an almost comical historical error in a story of development geared to explaining the present and the future through an almost natural unfolding of ever more European integration, increasing global collaboration and the embrace of liberal values, its economic regime, and democracy worldwide. It was also the time in which the European Union was born in 1993, and the Central and Eastern European states all aimed at joining its Western partners following the Copenhagen criteria from the same year. A real estate and media billionaire who used to sing on cruise ships in the summer months and owned a football club was hardly fitting the picture of global liberal triumphalism. And yet, he persevered. Berlusconi became the longest-standing Italian prime minister since the end of the Second World War with little over nine years in office despite a never-ending list of scandals and a problematic relationship with the law. Today, another real estate and media billionaire with a problematic relationship with the law managed to shape an image of himself as a man of the people, too, a non-elitist outsider swearing to save the country and make America, the real America, great again; and staged a successful first re-election following a 'gap-presidency' since 1892, ending in a complete victory over the House and the Senate for the Republican Party.

Culture and Power

It is thus high time indeed that Anheier and Knudsen remind us that cultural policy is part of today's power politics. They do so maybe unintentionally, but their usage of cultural policies is placed in a semantic field connected to 'soft power', 'ideology', and 'propaganda', with the terms being used almost interchangeably. Historically, expectations connected to external cultural policy have been prominently about dialogue, collaboration, art and literature. It was seen as an unpolitical way to shape relations between societies, weaving a fabric of mutual understanding that contributes to peace. Today, allegations of propaganda are connected to the Confucius Institute or the Russkiy Mir Foundation in Western societies. They are critically regarded as places which would not merely foster understanding between different societies and worldviews, but would consciously undermine the norms and views of the countries they are placed in. Just recently, the Al-Mustafa Institute in Berlin was found to be suspiciously close to the Iranian regime and as actively working against the German constitution.

Russia, on the other hand, has openly declared many foreign NGOs and organizations as "undesirable" and as "foreign agents", threatening Russia's security. Are Western institutions of external cultural policy infiltrating other nations with a foreign ideology? Who are we to call the others out for abusing culture as propaganda? Is the promotion of liberal democracies not

inversely identical? When this question was put to discussion following Helmut Anheier's thought-provoking presentation, the panel was struck by its impact. How can one keep an "arm's length" approach in times of war, distrust and extreme nationalism? It is quite impossible, it seems, to take a stand.

Culture is about power. Values are the new politics of the day: affirmations of exclusionary identities rather than invitations to a dialogue eager to find common ground. There may have once been an imagination of semantics of culture that could be characterized as 'soft culture' (mutual understanding, dialogue, common interest), but Anheier and Knudsen's connection to propaganda and ideology clearly makes us aware that we live in times of 'hard culture'. Similarly, 'soft power' is far from being soft these days. It also does not live a strategic life of its own. The soft power of Russia—clustering around the core concept of "Russkiy mir"—functions like a strategically placed wingman of hard power, legitimizing the use of military power in a new geopolitical struggle.

Cultural policy has become almost indivisibly connected with identity politics—hence the overlap with terms like 'ideology', 'propaganda' and 'soft power'. As identity politics, history plays a crucial role in the construction of narratives of legitimacy for political actions. Or, rather, it is the use of history— today, some even call it the "weaponization of history" in the context of Russian historical constructions. Those constructions under Putin place Russkiy mir at its heart. The Russian World forms the basis of cultural exchange projects. The above-mentioned Russkiy Mir Foundation sponsors cultural institutes internationally. The concept does not only serve as a vehicle of communication, however. Crucially, it is the basis of a historical narrative that legitimizes political action wherever the Russian world presides. Russkiy mir does not have boundaries. Like the early nineteenth-century German notion of a language-based nationalism, Russkiy mir includes all Russians outside state borders as well. The concept embraces the nation and all its so-constructed members, even beyond the territorial borders of the state.

We are painfully aware of how the concept is twisted into providing legitimacy for Russian intervention in Ukraine. And what if members of the 'Russian world' living in the Baltic countries or Georgia, for example, are regarded as living under so-defined "unfriendly conditions"? Russkiy Mir functions like a cynical version of the UN's concept of the Responsibility to Protect, yet is clearly based on different grounds when it comes to assessing what 'responsibility' means. When conditions arise which can no longer be tolerated, the responsibility to protect is invoked to legitimize an intrusion into another country or protect the citizens of another country from its government. With the legitimation of military aggression, history, in the eyes of some, has been weaponized by Russia—in the eyes of Russia, history is serving a worthy cause of reestablishing what has always been Russian, yet lost.

What is more, not only does Russia promote its own concepts of foreign relations in connection with culture, but it also embraces more liberal ideas, such as diversity. Russia, so the argument goes, needs to defend itself if it wishes to uphold true cultural diversity globally. It needs to safeguard Russian civilization from the West's internal logic of colonization and relentless imperial grasp. Russia's nationalism in many ways still reflects what Vlatcheslav Morozov called a "subaltern empire", embracing on the one hand the identity of the silenced subaltern who fell

victim to a so-constructed hegemonic and homogenizing West, while on the other hand, simultaneously acting as a ruthless empire with clear geopolitical goals of territorial expansion.

European and German Perspectives

Not only have nationalism and populism merged in many cases, but they have also shown resilience and growth over the last decades. The mistake of regarding phenomena like Berlusconi or Trump as hiccups of history should be avoided. In Europe, there is a chance of taming the new nationalist tendencies in a European frame, keeping the European Union not only alive, but strengthening it in its importance, considering the new fragility of the post-Cold War global order. What Josep Borrell has framed in 2020 as the Sinatra Doctrine (probably forgetful of the fact that this same name once described a policy of the Soviet Union under Gorbachev), alas, seems to be the only hopeful vision of a common European way. "We do it our way." It implies the redefinition of European relations with transatlantic and global partners, particularly China. It also, unfortunately, implies that the EU needs to think more like the nationalists it dislikes.

Inside the EU, nationalism and populism merge in several countries, as Anheier and Knudsen show in the report. The extreme right is well-organized. It is also well-funded and arguably better connected than the progressive forces. The role of Germany is highlighted in the paper in this regard. Is the country able to stem the tide of nationalist populism? While recent signs may be interpreted in a way that suggests that it may not be able to, Germany remains as the last country in Europe that has not witnessed the complete convulsion of the party system established after the Second World War. Everywhere else, from Italy to Spain, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, and so on, the postwar political world of mostly two major parties or camps has collapsed, the center slowly but surely eaten up by the fringes. While the US and Great Britain still have their (largely) two-party system, one of the two parties in each country has been co-opted by the radical nationalists—the Tories and the Republicans have collapsed, not the whole party system. In Germany, the same can be witnessed to some degree. The new parliament to be elected in early 2025 may have only five parties as it sometimes did following earlier elections. Yet this time, *Die Linke* and the FDP may not be part of it, but instead the AfD and the BSW. Still, however, German politics has a clear parliamentary majority in the political center with parties representing a heritage from the old Federal Republic of Germany. This is a remarkable achievement of stability despite the recent erosions, and the failure to integrate the East German heritage, when compared to Germany's European neighbors.

Still, Germany's resilience is powerless in the face of a changed global context. It is difficult today to imagine a global order based on liberal norms, if not outright impossible. The nationalisms of today are not constructed in ways that allow for a global vision, only for separate, co-existing, conflicting global visions. There may be a new cohesion of foreign policy falcons emerging in the West in the wake of the war in Ukraine, but in the end, they are more divisive than inclusive and based on a thinking of peace through strength.

Anheier and Knudsen mention nationalism's progressive nineteenth century movements and today's populist nationalism—jumping over a period in which liberal democracy had its breakthrough as a Western mode of government, and in which a world order was imagined and indeed shaped that was embracing the notion of the 'nation' as an unavoidable factor: The

Bretton Woods order from the late 1940s the early 1970s. The nation was there to stay (that much was clear already back then), yet to make sure national identity has its own right while sustaining and supporting a peaceful global order, nation-states were built along the lines of a shared normative, economic and financial framework. It was an international order of "embedded liberalism", in the words of political scientist John Ruggie.[18] Working towards a new Bretton Woods moment, a shared global order for all is a Herculean task from today's point of view, yet unavoidable if peace is to be sustainable.

Winning back the narrative?

Among the points raised by Anheier and Knudsen are the need to control the narrative, to win back a semantic hegemony, or, if not hegemony, at least a stringent, convincing voice on which the liberal democratic perspective can thrive and begin a semantic counterattack. This is true—and remains a similarly Herculean task. Future-proofing institutions and constitutions against a possible 'kidnapping' by nationalist populists is also an undeniably important task. Learning languages, founding European schools, promoting exchanges: all this is very important. Yet, all this has already been tried and arguably remained a project for a minority of citizens. Nationalists would call them "the elite".

Two very important points need to be considered if the suggested policy moves are to be successful: funding and emotions. The new cultural policies of the extreme right and the new nationalisms in general, as depicted in the report, are operationalized in well-funded, well-connected networks—even the richest man in the world is on their side. The new nationalisms we experience today are also somehow (still) connected in a manner of camaraderie. Yet first ruptures between their European variants emerge (notably, and rather remarkably, the French *Rassemblement National* thinks the German *Alternative für Deutschland* is too radical). The first lesson to be learnt here is that any policy aiming at winning back the narrative needs to understand that narratives are expensive. It takes a concerted, connected effort of established and new transnational networks of experts, activists, politicians and the corporate world. Secondly, the new narrative needs to be affective to a much stronger degree. A positive, future-oriented momentum needs to be shaped, something out of sight as of today.

Arjun Appadurai mentioned that the liberal democratic perspective has the advantage of owning the future, while the nationalists only have the past. Unfortunately, the contrary must be witnessed. The international coalition of nationalists shares the policy fields of anti-migration, anti-establishment, anti-'wokeism', anti-climate change, and anti-liberal internationalism; and they do so in highly emotional ways. While it may seem to sound backwards, the new nationalisms today are not simply evoking a fictional past as a nostalgia. While they certainly do that, too, they actively crowd in the interpretations and memories of liberal national narratives, and they also work on a future vision, claiming the concepts of peace and international justice. It is precisely the lack of a comprehensive future vision from within the liberal camp that is most alarming. Not only do the nationalists share an image of the future

[18] See: "International regimes, transactions, and change: embedded liberalism in the postwar economic order" in *International Organization* 36(2), 1982. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/john-ruggie/files/international_regimes_transactions.pdf.

for their respective nations, but they also share a European vision as well as an active engagement in shaping a shadow global governance system with the BRICS+ initiatives.

As a battered, but still standing liberal democratic society and party system, Germany must clearly invest heavily in a shared future for the world and its place within it. Anheier's and Knudsen's vital reflections will hopefully be inspiring.

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A Note from the Artist

In the past, extreme nationalism has frequently led to violence, countless deaths and unspeakable destruction. Its legacy is a heavy burden on following generations. Yet at the same time, we find it difficult to step out of its shadows as nationalism is rising again. That is what I wish to express in the pictures accompanying this report. We try to escape the shadows of the past and free ourselves from nationalist sentiments, yet we are entangled in a complicated web of what has happened and an overwhelmingly complex present where many look for easy answers in framing their future.

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