Enhancing the EU's International Cultural Relations:

The Prospects and Limits of Cultural Diplomacy

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Introduction

The last few years have seen a dramatic growth of interest in international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy in Brussels[1]. There are perhaps five key milestones in this process to date: (i) the publication in 2014 of the Preparatory Action Report on Culture in EU External Relations, *Engaging the World: Towards Global Cultural Citizenship* (EU, 2014); (ii) the delivery in June 2016 by HR Federica Mogherini of the Joint Communication, *Towards a Strategy for International Cultural Relations* (EU, 2016a); (iii) the inclusion of cultural diplomacy as an instrument of policy in the 2016 *Global Strategy* (EU, 2016b); (iv) the adoption by the EU Council in May 2017 of conclusions on an EU strategy for international cultural relations; and (v) the establishment of a Friends of the Presidency Group to steer the development of policy in this area (Council of the European Union, 2016).

The preference in the cultural policy community in Brussels is for the term 'International Cultural Relations' (hereafter ICR). Not all those engaged in international cultural relations see themselves engaged in cultural diplomacy (hereafter CD) aimed at the enhancement of national prestige, standing and influence of the EU and its member states in the wider international arena. But in the policy domain, it is clear from a reading of the 2016 *Global Strategy* that the enhancement of ICR is part of a wider EU vision for a better external policy. So, for this paper, ICR and CD are seen as two ends of a spectrum driven by the same dynamic—the enhancement of EU global engagement and, by extension, EU influence.

The *Policy Paper* identifies some of the key opportunities and constraints in the advancement of ICR and CD in the interactive relationship between culture and foreign policy. The opportunities in the relationship are perhaps better understood and will be identified in only cursory fashion. Less well articulated is the nature of the constraints facing European cultural foreign policy in the contemporary era[2]. These constraints we might usefully think of as being *structural, institutional* and *agential* in nature. The paper also identifies factors that may enhance the resilience of European actors engaged in ICR and CP in the face of constraint. Strategies of resilience are increasingly an essential element of ICR and CD.

The underlying, but not always articulated, question driving EU activity in this domain asks: To what extent can Europe's history of, accomplishments in, and contemporary expertise in culture broadly defined, advance the EU's global engagement and external relations? In clichéd terms, it asks to what extent can the EU's ICR and CD enhance Europe's 'soft power' (Nye, 2004)? And specifically, how might Europe be successful in its quest for enhanced ICRs in the face of a growing populist nationalist zeitgeist (hereafter PNZ)?

The judgment offered in this paper is that the EU's new strategy for the enhancement of ICR and CD might well be able to mitigate cross-cultural tensions. But, its success in doing so will be determined by the strength of the implementation processes and practices developed over the next few years; especially the degree to which both state and non-state action can

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1   Brussels means the European Commission, the External Action Service and the European Parliament.

2   Let me be quite specific concerning my own position. I am a liberal internationalist (a cosmopolitan in the pejorative language of the current populist era!). I am an advocate of enhanced international cultural relations as a positive contribution to liberal internationalism. My aim in producing this paper is to identify the constraints to be overcome in the successful implementation of international cultural policy, not to question its virtues.

overcome the coordination problems common to the EU external policy-making process. As is known, the major institutional puzzle for EU external relation is the degree to which it is possible for Brussels to develop a joined-up approach to ICR-CD, or even less ambitiously simply speak with a coherent voice. Foreign policy remains principally a national preserve of member states. In cultural foreign relations, primary decision-making competence explicitly rests with the member states. Brussels has only a *supplementary*, supporting competence.

1. Opportunities and Constraints

Culture comprises a spectrum of activities ranging from heritage (artifacts and icons) through music, theatre and old and new mediums of communication to language, ideas, beliefs and the support of cross-national research and education in the arts, humanities and social sciences as well as science. Cultural property and practices have both material and politico-strategic value, and all serve as mediums for ICR and CD. Cultural activity and organisations long ago escaped the boundaries of the state and in an optimum-case scenario ICR and CD, along with politico-strategic and economic relations, form a third pillar of foreign policy.

Pursued well, ICR and CD can be one of the most sustainable and visible instruments of external relations. Cultural (and educational) programmes tailored to the needs and interests of people in partner countries can create a broad basis for stable and positive international relations. At the same time, ICR can help build trust, support a country's societal development as well as assist business and political players to find important and reliable partners. At their best, cultural relations can help create stable

foundations for international relations in the dialogue between peoples. ICR and CD can promote European integration and present Europe and its member states as a modern and attractive location for education, science, research and professional development. None of this is contested, and it makes sense for the EU to strive to be good at ICR and CD in its own right.

1. a. Structure and Context

But the practice of ICR and CD by EU member states and attempts to develop common policy in Brussels do not operate in a vacuum. Recent policy developments reflect, in part at least, a growing response to the environment of existential crisis identified in the *Global Strategy* (2016b: 9). This crisis is well captured in comparison with the 2003 European Commission Strategy paper, *A Secure Europe in a Better World* and its 2016 counterpart. 2003 was a time of optimism. 2016 a time of pessimism, characterised minimally by:

(i) Growing scepticism and resistance towards globalisation and economic openness;

(ii) Growing scepticism for the wider European project, especially closer integration (President Juncker's September 2017 SOTEU notwithstanding);

(iii) Growing backlash against immigration;

(iv) The rise of what I have described elsewhere as the 'populist-nationalist zeitgeist' (hereafter PNZ) that has surged over the last few years.

Without elaboration in this paper (but for an extended discussion see Higgott and Proud,

2017), these four factors determine the operating environment in which those who would wish to enhance the EU's ICRs must operate. Actors, both state and non-state alike, can develop strategies of cultural resilience against the populist nationalist surge; however such strategies cannot evolve in isolation from wider socio-political-economic contexts that envelop them.

The development of the populist nationalist surge of the last few years reflects a political environment that is not conducive to ICR and CD. ICRs are underwritten by principles of internationalism and cosmopolitanism. By contrast, the current era reflects a time in which populist, nationalist and chauvinist approaches towards identity in international relations are stronger than at any time since the 1930s. The changing dynamics and sentiments are captured in illustration 1 below. Notable in the populist lexicon of the current era are the the assertions of nationalism over globalism, illiberalism over liberalism, propaganda over evidence; nationalist identity (ranging from chauvinism through to outright xenophobia) over wider societal and communitarian concern and an appeal to the supposed interests of real people over those of the cosmopolitan elites (see Miller, 2017).

Illustration 1. Populist Dynamics

Means (Tone and Approach)	Message (Rhetoric and Substance)	Critical Distinctions
Destruction v Elevation	Control v Helplessness	Nationalism v Patriotism
Assertion v Evidence	Taking Back v Giving Away	Societal concern v Racism
Propaganda v Information	Cultural Preservation v Identity Loss	Real people v Political Class
Personal Abuse v Argument	Security v Uncertainty/ Risk	Movement v Party
Connection v Disinterest	Self Determination v Red Tape/ Bureaucracy	Common Sense v Intellectual Arguments
Paranoia v Reassurance	Straight Talk v Political Obfuscation	Internal v External Focus

These populist dynamics, it should be said, *are not formal constraints* on the pursuit of ICR as much as they are the environmental context in which policy and practice must now operate. The problem they pose for the enhancement of international cultural relations is how democratic states counter inward looking nationalist agendas of the populist movements that conflict directly with the outward looking orientation of the exponents of cultural dialogues (both public and private) in the wider foreign policies of many, although not all, of the EU's member states, and indeed of the EU as a foreign policy actor in its own right.

1.b. Conceptual Constraints on the relationship between Culture and Foreign Policy

Conceptual issues are not simply a matter for the scholar. Confusion of what we mean by culture in ICR and CD casts massive shadows over policy effectiveness. While we might see and *know* more about the cultures of others now than in the past, it does not follow that we are better at *understanding* them, or that it leads to mutual respect and engagement. Traditional definitions of ICR and CD fail to distinguish between cultural values and norms.

In brief, here culture, from its German origins meaning 'self-realisation', reflects a society's historically determined, moral, religious and national beliefs. Culture is often seen as synonymous with a society's values. Norms, while culturally determined, are different. More precisely norms describe the prescriptive manner in which societal actors *behave* rather than what they *believe*. International cultural dialogues are usually about the norms of interaction between cultures, not cultural values *per se*. Discussions over norms are usually adaptive where discussions over culture are not (see Crowe, 2011: 6-11).

It is the evolving nature of norms that makes ICR and CD a difficult and unpredictable instrument in the pursuit of foreign policy and international relations; especially if trying to use ICR-CD as a vehicle for a more joined-up European policy in the face of populist nationalist challenges. As the European project has evolved in the post World War II era, we have tended to assume a set of shared substantive values at the heart of 'Western' culture—including *inter alia* commitments to a market economy, some variant of liberal democratic governance, a free press, religious tolerance and other human rights and a belief in the teleological assumptions of the European integration project—that we would

wish for others in a cultural dialogue with us to appreciate, receive and eventually accept.

The pace of change in the modes of communication, especially the rise of the new social media has placed considerable pressure on the normative modes of transfer of these values, which have become less controllable overtime. The EU *Preparatory Action* on the role of culture in the EU's external relations (EU, 2014: 8) stressed the growing salience of mutual learning and sharing in what it calls 'global cultural citizenship'. It recognised the increasing role of civil society and private sector actors, notably philanthropic organisations, corporate sponsors, higher education providers (public and private) and cultural relations organisations with their 'huge potential for enhancing European influence and attraction' (EU, 2014: 9). Culture, it said, had entered the heart of international relations thinking as a major public policy issue' (EU, 2014: 18).

While an empirically-rich report, the *Preparatory Action* lacked an appreciation of the emerging and critical environment of the current era captured in by PNZ. Moreover, it also had an essentially static view of culture. Yet culture responds to each new generation's aesthetics and tastes, changes in the economic and socio political context and technological disruption, especially the digital technology and the new social media. It understood how the revolution in communications created new possibilities for beneficial engagement within and between societies which have all but removed barriers to participation and exponentially extended the range of actors (official and otherwise) in international cultural relation. But it failed to grasp (as indeed many of us did) this revolution's ability to also create disruptive socio-politically behaviour of the kind seen in recent US and European elections (see Sunstein, 2017) and attendant negative implications for ICR and CD.

1.c. The Role of EU Agency

We invariably disagree about the norms, as practices, that will ensure delivery of cultures. These values and practices *per se* should not be assumed to amount to a common 'European cultural *persona* that can easily transcends national boundaries. That there may be *a core* of support for some generic values in Europe is not the same as *universal* support for them.

Arguing that European values are not amenable to universalisation is not to advocate an alternative strategy under-written by cultural relativism. How to sustain (or re-instate) cultural dialogues and proved space for diversity of expression both internal to and external to the EU, but without lapsing into cultural relativism, are intensely practical policy issues for our time. The rise of the PNZ has brought this fact home. The PNZ directly challenges many of the assumptions underpinning the universalising assumptions of the EU's new strategy for international cultural relations.

The 2016 Joint Communication and its subsequent adoption by the European Council as the EU's *strategic approach to international cultural relations* (EU 2016b) quite specifically identify international cultural relations as a significant element in the EU's wider foreign policy. The strategy, and by extension the role of its *de facto* agents ambiguously placed between state and society such as More Europe (More Europe), the Cultural Diplomacy Platform (CDP), and the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) pose questions for us. All appear to resist the idea that they are formally engaged in *cultural diplomacy* as opposed to international cultural relations. But this distinction is not as clean-cut as the funded organisations would like to affirm. As soon as funding comes from a state or EU source, the notion of autonomous

intercultural relations has to cede ground to a murkier relationship suggesting a role, in part at least, as an instrument of diplomacy. This is certainly the way in which those external partners as anticipated recipients of EU ICR and CD would see it.

This paper does not challenge the policy approach adopted by the Council in May 2017— *to act as a cross-cutting platform to draw up an integrated, comprehensive and step-by-step EU strategic approach to international cultural relations … [and to] … identify the common strategic principles, objectives and priorities* (Council of the European Council, 2016). But there must be a question mark over the EU's ability to successfully implement it. Even if differences in national cultures could be smoothed over by Brussels, there remains a *coordination problem* in which the interests of the main agents, the Commission, the EEAS and the member states, do not always coincide and will remain difficult to manage for as long as cultural relations are principally a member state competence. Indeed, as even the *Global Strategy Statement* notes: "Putting our diverse national cultures at the service of our shared interests is a challenge." And perhaps most tellingly, the strategy does not allocate any funds additional to those already available through existing Commission and Parliamentary instruments that appear to have simply been repackaged.

While not explicit, it is clear from reading the Joint Communication (2016a) and *Global Strategy Statement* (2016b) that cultural relations both within and beyond the borders of the EU are also meant to be important in the mitigation of the inward-looking nationalist influences of Europe's populist movements. The *Global Strategy Statement* talks about societal 'resilience' and the role of culture in securing it. But it does so in a 'catch all' non-specific and non-policy

targeted manner. Specifically, it says it will nurture "societal resilience also by deepening work on education, culture and youth to foster pluralism, coexistence and respect".

An alternative reading of the strategy, and the one most likely to be received beyond the borders of the EU, is that its real aim is to promote EU culture and values vis-à-vis the influences of those other great players in the contemporary global search for influence: the USA and China. While there is nothing inherently wrong with such a strategy, there is a risk that promotion of a common European culture may become political inflammatory if seen as a counter-weight populist-nationalist causes. The EU needs to tread very softly both within the EU and with third countries if it is not to fuel the PNZ resistance internally within the EU or generate a backlash externally towards cultural diplomacy with extra-European powers.

Indeed, the success of culture diplomacy must be measured through the eyes of the target audience. Influence and reciprocal knowledge sharing in cultural diplomacy is not assured. Cultural diplomacy is in constant need of re-mapping and checking with recipients. Re-mapping implies not only understanding what we mean by culture, but also the language and other mediums we use to promote it. Without re-mapping old legacies of resentment will remain and new resentments will develop. This is a particularly important issue for the EU in the current age. The EU is indeed a global actor, but it is currently beset by crises of confidence and identity that engulf it at a time of diminished global expectation compared with just a decade ago. But European cultural diplomacy is destined to fail if its message to the peoples and states on either side of the borders of the EU is that failure to adopt European values will impede the smooth functioning of international society in the modern era. Most states, and especially the major powers, would not accept this assumption.

The relationship between culture and foreign policy, and the cross-national influence of ideas, are both a conceptual problem and an empirical question, the separation of which is not easy. The long held cosmopolitan belief that the development of international cultural relations is inherently beneficial in foreign policy, and a good thing in its own right and not without value, can be too easily assumed. The strategy and tactics of populist nationalist actors in contemporary international relations tests that argument to its limits. The Brussels policy community is trying very hard to develop a strategy for cultural foreign policy that mitigates the worst excesses of nationalism, at the very time that illiberal nationalist sentiments have insinuated themselves into the body politic of many individual member states. Brussels' view of Europe's role as an international actor stands in sharp contrast to the positions adopted by the continent's principle nationalist populist movements and parties.

Populists invite *real* people to substitute experience for expertise with social media as a vehicle for sharing experiences and bonding. At the heart of the PNZ is a view that identity is local and *national*, not European. For the populist, culture must be defended against the diluting power of Brussels and the wider global and cosmopolitan liberal elite. Claims of a shared European culture, primarily by virtue of geography, are problematic. Building a shared culture is inevitably an iterative process. It is not likely to be much aided by top-down pro-EU cultural activities that fail to address the current nationalist populist angst.

At this precise moment, the populists concern is less a creeping EU culture, but what they describe as the immediate national cultural crisis threatened by out of control mass immigration facilitated by EU principles and incited by the actions of Merkel's government. The tangible

fear of an inability to assimilate large numbers, linked to factors such as challenges to language, religion and customs are very real and indeed a legitimate issue of public policy. It is something that nationalist populist actors do not see as a policy problem but as an existential challenge to the identity and sovereignty of the nation state.

Is this reading too bleak? Perhaps. While there may be no 'European persona', there is a sense of European 'actorness' in many key policy areas. The *Global Strategy* identifies a set of shared operating principles—*acting as a responsible global stakeholder promoting a rules-based global order*. Captured in the concept of 'principled pragmatism' the strategy determines the priorities for EU action. The key issue is whether they can be actioned.

2. What Can Be Done?

In order to undercut populist platforms, it is necessary to both: (i) build robust cultural resilience (and confidence) at a national level (see Capano and Woo, 2016 and Cross and LaPorte, 2016); and (ii) reassure citizens that the EU as a cultural, as well as an economic and legislative entity is not a threat to national identity. This requires positive support for the wider European project that goes to the heart of EU strategy in the *Global Vision* statement.

Networks of non-state actors are understood to be a central feature of the 21st century world (see Slaughter, 2017). These networks will be important for building cultural resilience and supporting ICR and CD in the face of the PNZ. At the interface of government and non-government sectors, there are umbrella organisations in the European cultural space, notably but not exclusively EUNIC that, without formally articulating such a position, have an interest in resisting the narrow attitudes of the PNZ towards culture and international cultural relations. This offers both strength and weakness. It is strength because there are a large number of actors involved in at the interface of ICR and CD operating at EU level.

Illustration 2. Networking EU cultural agents and actors

Egs - European Movement   European Alliance For Culture & The Arts   European Cultural Foundation
Culture Action Europe   A Soul for Europe   Citizens for Europe   Europa Nostra   ENCATC
Funding, Education, Development, Networking

EU CIVIL ORGS

National Cultural Funds & Institutions   EUNIC (and members)   *- Egs*
Practitioner Networks & Alliances   Creative Europe
Higher Education Institutions   Cultural Diplomacy Platform

NATIONAL CIVIL ORGS   **EUROPEAN UNION** Values and Beliefs   **EU INSTITUTIONS**

Egs - Pulse of Europe   Parliament   *- Egs*
European Moment   Friends of the President
Why Europe   Commission, (EEAS & EAC)
March for Europe
On Our Watch

Grassroots Activation   **CITIZENS**   **NATIONS**   **Treaties & Enforcement**
Government Ministries

It is a weakness because, as can be gleaned from the illustration above, it presents obvious coordination problems. There are over 300 cultural networks, many located in Brussels, with members all over Europe. These groups are coming together more than in the past to consider the implications of, and their role in countering, the PNZ (see for example IETM, 2017 and the empirical discussion in Higgott and Proud, 2017). But it is difficult to measure just how effective non-partisan grassroots organisations are as cultural actors both nationally and transnationally. Arts and cultural communities can be positioned to play a role against the PNZ. Their models can highlight common values across borders and share objectives to combat the PNZ.

At a minimum, they can open minds and give people the means to imagine an alternative to the populist message; good storytelling can help people identify with others, care about their journey and issues, and act as an antidote to the lack of empathy (*pace* Donald Trump) that underlies many of the extreme views of populist leaders. But the risk for movements based on broad principles rather than specific outcomes is that initial enthusiasm and momentum can fade as supporter fatigue sets. Youth is a good example. It is actively involved in the pro-EU movements. But it is worth noting that its incentives may be quite different from the generic, principled aims of 'elder statesmen'. For the young, support for the EU is much more specific. The EU passport is seen as more valuable than a national one. However, that their support for the EU is personal and logistic matters less than that it is support *per se.*

2.a. The Role of Arts and Cultural Industries

The arts and cultural community is the source of much social analysis and critique and as Leerson (2017) notes: '…while culture will not necessarily solve our problems, a lack of culture will definitely exacerbate them.' Artists remain one of the many sources of challenge to the status quo. They exhibit a preference for open, argumentative and Socratic discourse. By contrast, as we see in many countries, populists tend to be uncomfortable with these methods. They tend to prefer silence or discrediting the views of others.

Much of our discussion about culture and arts presumes art presented in traditional form: that is "high art" or "high culture". But when television, film, music and social media connect with people where they live and play there may be little or no time to focus on high culture. In terms of reach, this is where successful engagement, if it is to happen, is most likely to be found and the artistic and cultural influence in a world of virtual reality should not be ignored in developing resilience strategies against the PNZ. But how to reach the wider audience will always be the key question. The role of art in such contexts is noble but problematic. Agenda-driven artistic expression is unlikely to mitigate long-standing populist opinion and may risk sacrificing quality for messaging. At its worst, it can also enhance polarisation.

*Perhaps the major task of arts and culture then is to resist **the normalising** of the behaviour of populists and nationalists when they are at the height of their powers:* to continually remind us that such behaviour is the deviant not the norm. One test of resilience is the degree to which everyday life goes on in spite of the pressures emanating from authoritarian and illiberal regimes. Continuity cannot be assumed. History shows

us how musicians, filmmakers, writers and even architects were hi-jacked as propaganda tools by for example both Hitler and Stalin (Morrison, 2017).

It is here that art and culture are important. They need to stay a subversive idea structure. It needs to make sure that the cultural ground does not freeze under populism. Culture must flow around it. It can reflect the values of that community, speak truth about culture, expose political and social hypocrisy within a nation, improve the quality of life, build social and cultural capital and inject imagination into processes of resilience and re-invention. Let us not forget that the European anthem, *Ode to Joy*, when written by Beethoven was in fact a strident cry for universal freedom. If the civic cultural capital of a country can resist and survive the damage done by populism, then populism's challenge can be limited in the long run. Art, writing, theatre, comedy and the technological mediums of cinema, music and social media provide vehicles for challenging the popular-nationalist zeitgeist and both its domestic and international political impact.

It can be argued that after nearly 70 years of a liberal world order underwritten to a greater or lesser extent by the USA acting as a self-binding hegemon, we are entering a period when transactional, power-based engagement in international politics is emerging. We see this at its most pronounced in US foreign policy under Donald Trump (but also in part in Putin's Russia and Xi Jinping's China). This is not a world in which Europe will fare well. The EU needs what we might call a *post neo-liberal approach* to international relations and foreign policy. More than any other major global actor, Europe has an interest in a *rules-based liberal order founded on cooperation*. Such an order plays to Europe's strengths and offsets, in part at least, its materi-

al and security weaknesses. This is recognised in the *Global Strategy* paper. Supporting this approach begins within the borders of the EU.

In-country liberal resilience in Europe does not mean crushing populism and nationalism. Rather, it means responding to it where it can and *containing* it where it must. Let us not forget that to be a liberal society means accommodating diversity and not insisting that all groups subscribe to liberal values. Such an insistence would contradict liberalism's own commitment to individualism and openness. But liberalism needs to reassert the virtues of openness if it is to mitigate the appeal of modern populism. Culture must play its role here.

Art and culture's role in securing a strong European international narrative in the face of populism and nationalism will always be an unlikely and ambiguous combination of a theoretical abstraction of European collective ideas on the one hand—converging around virtues of openness and democracy—and, on the other, a concrete historical experience in which embracing these ideas in practice requires the shedding at tightly defined ideas of identity and national closure. This is a difficult proposition at this time as we live with a conundrum. Europe's greatest successes—creating a regime of the free exchange of ideas, values and yes, people over time—has become its Achille's heel. Objections to the idea of globalism and the practice of cross-border migration have become anathema in the PNZ. The ideas of the PNZ in the hands of populist movements and parties have fuelled the critique of the EU as non-transparent, unaccountable and lacking legitimacy.

Cultural civil society movements might have a role in mitigating these critiques. If the EU is to ward off the closure of borders and indeed the closure of minds, as contemplated by the popu-

list and nationalist discourse, it must combine an organic, bottom up with and a more formal top down, directed approach to the development of ICR. To give one example, EUNIC while explicitly non-political nevertheless sees its role supporting the European project and doing so, in the words of the Joint Communication, *by building trust and understanding between the peoples of Europe and the rest of the world through culture.* It is thus implicitly working in opposition to the closed approach of international cultural relations found among advocates of the PNZ.

Without a strong network of support, an expectation that artistic and cultural groups can achieve wide reaching impact in countering the PNZ is optimistic. Arts funding is a perennial and much discussed issue, but how to support these groups preferably through existing organisations and networks rather than creating new ones, is an essential part of any strategy if they are to participate in the broader enhancement of the EU project.

The development of a strategic approach to cultural relations within the arts and cultural communities is an increasingly salient area of Europe's international relations. But the balance in the relationship between policy makers, civil society organisations and practitioners, given the different priorities and motivations of their respective endeavours, will always be a delicate one. Whilst on the same spectrum, informal cultural *interaction* and formal cultural *diplomacy* at the ends of that spectrum, can be far apart, with 'cultural *relations*' sitting somewhere between. The Council of the European Union, in its adoption of the strategy, gives us an insight into the tasks facing its successful implementation. It places a high degree of reliance on non-governmental actors such as More Europe, the Cultural Diplomacy Platform and EUNIC. This has both strengths and weaknesses.

Given its position at the interstices of policy and practice, EUNIC is becoming an essential interlocutor between the Brussels policy world and that of the world of arts and culture. Indeed, this is a position that has been recognised in the signing of the MOU between the EEAS and EUNIC to assist in the *administration* of European ICR (EU, 2017). If EUNIC did not exist, you would want to invent it. It is not yet clear that a similar case could be made for the Cultural Diplomacy Platform. Longer-standing and proven initiatives have been on offer for some time from a wide range of extant highly relevant actors such as the International Network of Contemporary Performing Arts (IETM) and the European Network on Cultural Management and Policy (ENCATC) in the civil society sector and in the European university sector and think tank sectors such as the Universities of Sienna and Edinburgh, the Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB), CERI and Clingendael that all have broad expertise in public diplomacy, including cultural diplomacy, but that do not isolate cultural diplomacy from wider international and foreign policy contexts as seems to be the case with some of the Brussels-sponsored institutions.

3. The Limits of Cultural Diplomacy in EU Foreign Policy

Endeavouring to make the best of Europe's cultural assets is sensible and rational and so rightly becomes an instrument of policy. But assumptions that EU can stem its declining influence vis-a-vis the traditional, if troubled, hegemon, the USA, and the rising global force of China is pietistic rather than analytic. Even ignoring the PNZ, other serious problems exist.

EU partners, especially in the Middle East and many other developing countries, will always treat cultural diplomacy with suspicion. The

problem is less the substance and virtue of western cultural values *per se*. Rather, the issues are (i) the well-understood residual historical legacies of mistrust (see for example Bowden, 2009); and (ii) the modern 'norms-as-practices' that would be necessary for transnational/cross-border delivery of EU culture. To suggest that there is a common and aspirational European culture available for export, as some of the more assertive brands of European normative power do, is at best foolhardy, at worst ethnocentrically arrogant. While there may be some substance to the *Global Strategy* suggestion that the EU's *joint* potential is unparalleled, HR Federica Mogherini's 2016 assertion that Europe was a 'cultural superpower' was at best misconceived and, at worst, inept (EU-news, 2016). Self-identification as a 'superpower' is not a notion that easily lends itself to the improvement of international cultural relations; especially with parts of the world with different historical experiences of European colonialism, different, socio-cultural traditions and on different political trajectories.

While the rhetoric of EU international cultural relations is strong (at least in Brussels), the likelihood of concrete outcomes—especially in member states with their own strong traditions of cultural diplomacy—should not be overestimated. The Commission has only 'supporting competence' in cultural diplomacy (Art 6, TFEU). A foreign policy coordination problem, reflected at times in the tense relationship between the member states and the EEAS, is always present in Brussels. For some member states, the role of the EEAS is still little more than that of a policy *amplifier*. Cultural diplomacy is no exception. The *Joint Communication* reflects this ambiguity, and cultural diplomacy secures only one sentence in the *Global Strategy Statement* asserting that *new fields of our joined-up external*

action include energy diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and economic diplomacy (EU, 2016b: 49).

Moreover, the superpower analogy fails to reflect the reality of the often non joined-up relationship between Brussels and the member states. This is the case both informally but also formally. This naive given that even the Council Conclusions on the Strategy stress the principle of subsidiarity and 'ensuring full complementarity with Member States' actions' (Council of the European Union, 2017). Deconstructed, this is confirmation of the primacy of member states in ICR and CD.

This Paper has suggested that there will be constraints on the EU's ability to implement the strategy. In addition, even if differences in national cultures could be smoothed over by Brussels, there remains a coordination problem as long as ICR is principally a member state's competence. Moreover, 'crowding out' is an issue in a packed, and expensive, external relations agenda. CD may be a 'new field of joined-up external action', but it is to be expected that older, more traditional hard power priorities will grow and continue to secure the lions' share of resources. Security is increasingly a domestic problem as much as it is an international. Pressures to meet enhanced hard security obligations will predominate. As was noted, the strategy does not allocate any new funds additional to those already available under existing instruments and practices in the current funding round.

Conclusion

This Policy Paper has probably raised more questions than it has answered. It has tried to identify both opportunities and constraints on the development of a European strategy for international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy. It has suggested that there are three types of constraints—*structural* (politico-economic context), *ideational* (defining the appropriate normative agenda for ICR-CD) and *agential* (the role of people and institutional agents). These big picture constraints cast an immediate policy shadow; namely how do we address three practical problems: How do we: (i) overcome the *competence problem* in the policy making relationship between the member states and Brussels; (ii) how do we resolve the perennial *coordination problem*; (iii) how do we address the *funding problem*?

The caveats placed on the prospect for a successful EU strategy for international cultural interaction are not arguments for cultural relativism or a critique of European values *per se*. Rather, while the EU's *stated* strategic cultural aim is to promote *diversity* in cultural relations, the reading likely taken by recipients on the receiving end of the strategy beyond the border of the EU, is that its *real* aim is to promote the EU's interests, standing in search for contemporary global search for influence—especially *vis-à-vis* the USA and China. Again, there is nothing wrong with such a strategy. But the EU needs to tread very softly with third countries if it is not to generate a backlash. In such a context, it will be interesting to observe over the next few years the degree to which cultural diplomacy can really be, in HR Mogherini's own words '... at the core of our foreign policy'.

Recommendations for a more joined-up approach to EU cultural diplomacy*

1. **Resist endeavours to secure an agreed European narrative.** It does not exist.

2. **Eschew attempts to formally define cultural diplomacy.** Its meaning will differ across Europe and beyond. To the extent that a *European position* exists or develops, support for it will always be issue-area or policy sector specific not generic.

3. **Develop strategies to map and re-map the evolving nature of ICR and CD activity.** Do so by drawing on recent innovation in digital mapping to create a tool specific to mapping for EU cultural relations and cultural diplomacy.

4. **Accept that ICR and CD are two ends of a spectrum of policy areas in their own right rather than discrete entities.** Resist seeing them simply as second-tier instruments of an ill-defined notion of soft power.

5. **Accept the primacy of sovereignty in ICR and CD.** Collective EU approaches towards cultural diplomacy are constrained by the sovereignty of member states for as long as ICR-CD has only a secondary Brussels provenance.

6. **Given 5 above, revisit the issue of the locus of core competence.** If cultural diplomacy is to be a core part of the EU's *Global Strategy,* then at the very least consideration should be given to providing it with the competency to play a joined-up role.

7. **Create designated funding.** While funding for supporting the ICR strategy arising from the Joint Communication is available in Brussels, it is dispersed. A designated fund to

support the strategy must be secured in the next funding round and put at the disposal of an appropriate instrument in the EEAS.

8. **Develop a joined-up structure of governance for ICR and CD.** Recognising the ambiguous nature of the relationship between state and non-state actors in ICR, the principle stakeholders need to be identified and the structures of governance need to be worked out in some detail. Specifically:

   a. The role of the *Friends of the Presidency Group* (on a strategic approach to international cultural relations) needs to be formally and clearly determined after its definition of the initial roadmap is completed.

   b. The role of the EEAS needs to be fully articulated and explained for the clarity of stakeholders in the arts and cultural communities

   c. Articulate a precise role for the important non-state networks and interlocutors such as EUNIC in the relationship between the policy community and civil society.

   d. Similarly, consideration should be given to the future role of *Creative Europe* now that the new strategy has been adopted.

9. **Revisit training in Cultural Diplomacy.** Serious and systematic thought about the nature of training that is offered in cultural diplomacy is required, beyond what has amateurishly been the case to date. Instruction cannot, as many from the cultural sector seem to think, be developed and taught in isolation of the wider considerations of overall EU external relations and strategy more generally. Engage Europe's universities in this process.

* The recommendations reflect only the author's view, with no responsibility allocated to others.

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