

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



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

# Culture in EU External Relations: Strategic Reflections and Future Scenarios

Riccardo Trobbiani - UNU-CRIS  
Andrea Pavón-Guinea - University of Navarra

Issue 2019/16 • February 2019

## Acknowledgements

This paper incorporates responses to a questionnaire circulated within the EL-CSID Consortium in June 2018. Responses were submitted by EL-CSID Researchers Kristina Bekenova (Nazarbayev University), Caterina Carta (VUB), Neil Collins (Nazarbayev University), Antoine Hatzenberger (EMUNI), Jos Leijten (JIIP), Annamarie Bindenagel Šehović (University of Warwick), Domenico Valenza (UNU-CRIS). The authors would like to thank Andrew Murray, former Director of EUNIC Global, for having provided them with countless insights on the latest policy developments. Responsibility for the information and views set out in this publication lies entirely with the authors.

## Executive summary

The future of EU International Cultural Relations (ICR) will depend upon factors which this policy paper presents as internal and external to the EU. In reality, they influence each other and transcend political borders. The rise of populist and nationalist forces takes place both within and outside Europe. The global nature of the challenges humanity faces in terms of trust, tolerance and education affect in different ways all countries and transversally impact our capacity to achieve sustainable development. Hard power seems to be gaining prominence over soft power and persuasion. Uses of soft power (and propaganda) persist in the framework of identity politics, where culture is increasingly regarded as a set of national features defined in oppositions to others, rather than a tool for dialogue and cooperation. In whatever direction these factors evolve, the foresight analysis presented in this paper points at a key finding: *investing in stronger EU cooperation in International Cultural Relations, rather than Cultural Diplomacy, remains the best solution for EU leadership*. An EU strategic approach to ICR rooted in development policy and inter-cultural dialogue bears the promise to facilitate cooperation among EU institutions, member states (MS) and their cultural institutes, as well as broader cultural networks based on innovative models. An approach based on subsidiarity and arm's length relations with cultural actors can serve EU's interests better than a top-down Cultural Diplomacy. However, a series of criticalities could potentially affect this emerging policy, which calls for some recommendations on the process and content of the approach under development.

- First, **there is a need for conceptual clarity**. As explained in this paper, despite the clear direction taken by the debate on enhanced cooperation on ICR, some attachment on the side of EU institutions to the term Cultural Diplomacy remains. If the European Commission and EEAS feel that there is a need for stronger strategic communications and more assertive policies in fields of competition with other powers, e.g. in counter-acting propaganda from countries like Russia, a separate approach should be developed. Importantly, it should be made clear that these are two different things.

- Second, it is advisable that the concept of 'culture' does not reproduce a logic of security in the design and implementation of EU ICR. **The use of culture in international relations should not fall into the logic of Huntington's clash of civilizations'** thesis where cultures 'appear as quasi-ontological units that relate to a specific conflictual structural disposition and legitimize specific interpretations of regional and international politics'. Cultural difference should better reflect the thinking behind the discourse on the 'unity in diversity' whereby cultures are understood as sources of cooperation and not as causes of conflict.

- Third, **the new approach should strongly learn from the lessons of advanced EUNIC clusters and adapt existing resources in EU headquarters and delegations**. Also, more support, guidelines and advice from headquarters of EUNIC, EUNIC members and EU are required to communicate and implement the new approach.

- Fourth, **the debate on EU ICR should be as inclusive as possible, keeping in mind that there will be a large set of actors implementing the new approach**, and they should be taken on board in the definition phase. This applies to smaller EU MS which have less capacities for ICR, for instance in terms of reach of their national cultural relations network. Also, it will be important to listen to European and key foreign cultural actors (e.g. working in the Mediterranean) which are not directly represented in Brussels, as many ministries of culture from third countries but also foundations, museums, theatres, libraries, universities will have an important role in the implementation phase.

- Fifth, **relations with strategic partners and more generally advanced and emerging economies needs specification**. While the 2016 Communication promised particular attention to EU's strategic partners, which are mostly developed or emerging economic powers, most of the debate on EU ICR, including the best practices highlighted by EUNIC, points at relations with developing countries, especially in the EU Neighbourhood.

- Sixth, developing an innovative and impactful new external policy in the field of culture means **that a reflection must take place on the adaptation of cultural relations to ICT and digital transformation**. This has been almost inexistent in the current debate on ICR but cannot be avoided unless the EU wants to develop a strategic approach for a simply 'physical' cooperation, which would become increasingly limiting in the next decades.

- Finally, **evaluation mechanisms should be included at every stage of the policy-making process** since ICR are in 'constant need of re-mapping and checking with recipients'.

## 1. Background and objectives

Culture and international relations have a long history of mutual influence. The use of arts to facilitate diplomatic processes was documented in the context of Renaissance Europe.<sup>1</sup> In more recent times, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have provided diverse examples of the role of broadly defined culture in international relations.<sup>2</sup> The concept of Cultural Diplomacy (CD) has progressively gained ground, first and most widely in application to the study of the Cold War, especially US' and USSR's attempts to 'win the hearts and minds' of people in the opposite bloc. The affirmation of the term, however, did not bring conceptual clarity regarding how culture and international relations relate to each other. On the opposite, it became a 'catch-all' term for very diverse phenomena ranging from political propaganda to funding of arts in development policies.

The European Union (EU) has progressively tried to develop its own approach in this field, starting from the 2007 *European agenda for culture in a globalizing world*, which identified 'culture in external relations' as one of its pillars. Successive Council Conclusions,<sup>3</sup> European Parliament (EP) resolutions<sup>4</sup> and an ad-hoc Preparatory Action<sup>5</sup> led to the 2016 Joint Communication *Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations* (hereafter 2016 Communication) presented by the European Commission (EC) in June 2016,<sup>6</sup> later endorsed by the Council and European Parliament (EP) and currently in its specification and early implementation phase. International cultural relations (ICR) were also incorporated in broader EU cultural policies, becoming one of the three objectives on the 2018 *New European Agenda for Culture*<sup>7</sup> and one of the five priorities of the *Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022* adopted by the Council.<sup>8</sup>

Regular debate and cooperation between EU services and the key stakeholders, most importantly national institutes for culture, have tried to flesh out the concept of EU ICR and define an added value for EU-level cooperation vis-à-vis national approaches, which have so far constituted the norm. The emergence of well-defined EU ICR is faced with challenges which are both of a conceptual and practical nature.

On the one hand, different EU institutions and bodies have used both the terms ICR and CD with reference to the emerging policy on the use of culture in EU external relations. While it has progressively become clear that the EU aims to develop capacity in the former – as CD largely remains a competence of its member states (MS) – conceptual confusion remains. In fact, EU institutions seem to be attracted by both culture as a strategic communication tool to change perceptions abroad within a 'soft power' approach, which is closer to CD, as well as cultural cooperation as mutual engagement, dialogue and capacity building, expressed as ICR. Apart from considerations on the legitimacy and usefulness of an EU CD as a concept guiding policy making, its use as a label for external communication on EU initiatives appears problematic. In fact, the word 'diplomacy' potentially alienates support of EU MS protecting their foreign policy competences, cultural actors guarding their independence, and foreign audiences – especially in the developing world – who bear remembrance of European cultural colonialism.

On the other hand, the political contexts external and internal to the EU present both obstacles and opportunities for the emergence of stronger EU ICR. On the global level, hard power seems to be gaining prominence over soft power and persuasion. Additionally, in the framework of growing identity politics, culture is increasingly regarded as a set of national features defined in oppositions to others, rather than tool for dialogue and cooperation. Within the EU, reflection of these global trends is accompanied by the more general rise of prominence of political forces that oppose further 'communitarisation' of competences across policy fields and might particularly wish to keep control over sensitive areas such culture and foreign policy.

As part of the policy reflection process on culture in EU external relations, the H2020 project 'European Leadership in Cultural, Science and Innovation Diplomacy' (EL-CSID) has extensively enquired into different aspects of these challenges and provided insightful case studies. Based on this work and on selected literature from other sources, the current paper seeks to explore the possible developments facing the EU and its role of leadership in cultural relations at the global level. Engaging

---

<sup>1</sup> Elam, C. 1988. Art and Diplomacy in Renaissance Florence. *RSA Journal* 136(5387), 813-826.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Gienow-Hecht, J. & Schumacher, F. (Eds.). 2004. *Culture and International History*. Berghahn Books.

<sup>3</sup> Council of the EU. 2008. Council Conclusions on the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in the external relations of the Union and its Member States, Brussels, 20/11/2008.

<sup>4</sup> EP. 2011. European Parliament resolution on the cultural dimensions of the EU's external actions', Brussels, 12/05/2011.

<sup>5</sup> Preparatory Action 'Culture in EU External Relations. Engaging the World: Towards Global Cultural Citizenship', <http://culture.inexternalrelations.eu/>.

<sup>6</sup> EC. 2016. *Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations*, Brussels, 08/06/2016.

<sup>7</sup> EC. 2018. *A New European Agenda for Culture*, Brussels, 22/05/2018.

<sup>8</sup> Council of the EU. 2018. *Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022*, Brussels, 15/11/2018.

in a foresight analysis, its aim is to provide a reflection on future scenarios and how EU action could influence and operate within them. This is an exercise intimately connected with policy planning and can help make informed choices as events unfold.

The work aims to identify challenges facing the EU in the further development of its ICR in the next 5-10 years. There are two major components to be considered for this exercise:

- (i) *An analysis of the politico-economic and security contexts in which (...) [cultural relations are] likely (or not) to flourish over the next decade. (...)*
- (ii) *An institutional and process analysis of the instruments at the disposal of the EU (...) in the conduct of [cultural relations]; especially the degree to which this is 'managed' top-down or encouraged to grow organically from the bottom up.<sup>9</sup>*

The identification of four possible scenarios and the broader reflection provided by this paper are based on an extensive literature review, use of official documents produced by the EU and other relevant organisations as well as on a questionnaire distributed within the EL-CSID project consortium, compiled by seven researchers with academic and practical experience on the topic (see Acknowledgements).

The paper starts by discussing the concepts of ICR and CD and the challenges related to their adoption by the EU. The following section then identifies the internal and external variables likely to affect the development of an EU ICR and draws four different scenarios based on this reflection. Afterwards, the study discusses the implications of this foresight exercise for the main actors and instruments involved in the definition of the strategic approach and highlights the importance of subsidiarity therein. A final section provides some concluding statements and policy recommendations.

## 2. Concept and related challenges

The 2016 Communication committed to both promoting ICR through enhanced cooperation at the EU level and supporting EU MS through CD. In order to advance in the field of ICR, three work streams were proposed: supporting culture as an engine for social and economic development; promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations; and reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage for cultural diversity to be internationally protected. Following this, an enhanced EU cooperation approach to CD was proposed, without providing a punctual definition of the difference with the former term.<sup>10</sup> EU intentions have progressively become more focused on ICR, and in the 2017 partnership arrangement between the EC, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network, milestone of that enhanced cooperation, the word CD had already disappeared.<sup>11</sup> This is a welcome development since the EU is not structurally prepared to engage in the realm of CD, which is a competence of the EU MS, and should instead see itself as a facilitator in enhancing cooperation in ICR for the reasons proposed below.

To start with, the literature reveals that there is no universally agreed-upon definition of what 'cultural' means in CD and ICR, probably because 'culture' is such a difficult term to define.<sup>12</sup> Practitioners of CD and ICR usually understand the concept differently: against the narrow conception of 'culture' as 'the arts' proposed in CD research and practice, 'culture' in ICR 'spans a wide range of policies and activities, from intercultural dialogue to tourism, from education and research to the creative industries, from protecting heritage to promoting new technologies, and from artisanship to development cooperation'.<sup>13,14</sup>

Apart from the lack of agreement on the conceptual meaning of the word 'culture', there is also a problem of nomenclature between the concepts of CD and ICR in the area of how nations and people relate to each other through culture.<sup>15</sup> The Berlin-based NGO 'Institute for Cultural Diplomacy' advertises CD as 'the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, aiming at strengthening relationships, enhancing sociocultural cooperation or promoting national interests'.<sup>16</sup> Among academic definitions, Nick Cull has put the emphasis on the international environment and defines CD as an 'actor's attempt to manage the international environment through

---

<sup>9</sup> H2020 Project 'EL-CSID', Grant Agreement 693799, Work Package 1, Task 3.

<sup>10</sup> EC. 2016. op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> EC, EEAS and EUNIC. 2017. Administrative arrangement, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/2017-05-16\\_admin\\_arrangement\\_eunic.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/2017-05-16_admin_arrangement_eunic.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Mark, S. 2009. A greater role for cultural diplomacy. Clingendael Discussion Paper in Diplomacy, p.5.

<sup>13</sup> EC. 2016. op. cit., p.4

<sup>14</sup> Murray, A. 2019. Email conversation with the authors. 21/01/2019.

<sup>15</sup> Rose, M. 2017. A New Cultural Diplomacy, IFA Input 3/2017, p. 1, bold added.

<sup>16</sup> Institute for Cultural Diplomacy. no date. President Message, Center for Cultural Diplomacy Studies, p. 3, [http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/articles/ccds/CCDS\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/articles/ccds/CCDS_Brochure.pdf).

making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad'.<sup>17</sup> These two definitions focus on the content and structural context of the diplomatic action. However, the ambiguity concerning the notion of CD partly stems from the vagueness in most conceptualizations about the agency of the action. That is why in a now classic definition of CD, former cultural diplomat Arndt<sup>18</sup> distinguishes between CD and ICR by laying the emphasis on agency. CD occurs when diplomats serving national governments take recourse to culture for the advancement of national interests, whilst ICR 'grow naturally and organically' and refer to the 'exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding'.<sup>19</sup>

CD and ICR have come to be used interchangeably as the 'reigning culturalism of our time has made the concept of culture increasingly appealing'<sup>20</sup> and as geopolitical, social and economic transformations have led to a new relevance for international cultural policies. However, CD and ICR pose different conceptual and empirical challenges in the use of culture in external actions. They are not synonyms that can be used interchangeably without any further policy implications: conceptual confusion 'casts massive shadows over policy effectiveness'.<sup>21</sup>

CD and ICR diverge in their means, objectives and motivations and all of these differences 'can be traced to the particular role of government'<sup>22</sup> in their design and implementation. Cultural diplomacy refers to 'the deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy'.<sup>23</sup> In other words, CD understands culture as part of foreign policy processes and as a means of wielding soft power through the attractiveness of a given national culture in the international arena.<sup>24</sup> Cultural diplomacy is funded, designed and delivered by governments, which instrumentalise culture in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives that serve the national interest.

Cultural relations, in contrast, refer to the 'mutual exchange of culture between peoples to develop long-term relationships, trust and understanding for the purpose of generating influence abroad; ICR usually remains free of political influence and is independent of foreign policy objectives. If ICR supports national interests is always indirectly and as a 'byproduct of the trust, understanding, and relationships developed through cultural relations'.<sup>25</sup>

Although drawing a line in the semantic field of CD and ICR is useful in terms of policy-planning and policy-making, some ambiguities persist from the academic and practitioners' point of view. In the age of globalization, 'culture can be instrumentalised without government intervention and cultural relations might contribute to foreign policy goals without formal steering from national governments'.<sup>26</sup> Despite these grey zones and overlaps, the conceptual distinctions between CD and ICR should remain as they convey different attitudes, approaches, means and goals.

Taking this into account, ICR seems more suitable for the theory and practice of culture in the EU external action due to its nature as a post-modern and post-Westphalian diplomatic actor.<sup>27</sup> The EU should complement MS' actions in the field of culture in international relations by enabling frameworks for cultural cooperation. The EU is not strategically prepared to compete in the fields of nation-branding and cultural showcasing. Diplomacy takes place today in an international environment that is no longer state-centric and therefore it should focus on engaging with foreign audiences with the aim to build mutual and stable relationships. In this way, the EU ICR should strive to 'build relationships with civil society actors in other countries and facilitate networks between non-governmental parties at home and abroad'.<sup>28</sup>

ICR must align themselves with the political and communication dynamics of the modern world if they are to be effective today. Top-down one-way mass communication approaches are no longer strategic; publics are not passive recipients of information, but active participants who aim to co-create the message's content. Therefore, the EU ICR strategy should establish dynamic network structures with non-state actors with the aim to absorb and integrate cultural diversity, instead of magnifying

---

<sup>17</sup> Cull, N. 2009. *Public Diplomacy: lessons from the past*, CPD Perspectives, p.19.

<sup>18</sup> Arndt, R. 2006. *The first resort of kings: American cultural diplomacy in the twentieth century*, Potomac Books, p. xviii.

<sup>19</sup> Cummings, M. 2003. *Cultural diplomacy and the United States government: a survey*. Center for Arts and Culture Washington, DC, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Ang, I., Raj Isar, Y. & Mar, P. 2015. Cultural diplomacy: beyond the national interest?. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21(4), 365-381, p.367.

<sup>21</sup> Higgott, R. 2017. Enhancing the EU's ICR: the prospects and limits of cultural diplomacy. EL-CSID Policy Paper 2017/3, p.5.

<sup>22</sup> Rivera, T. 2015. Distinguishing cultural relations from cultural diplomacy, CPD Perspectives, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Mark, S. 2009. op. cit., p.7

<sup>24</sup> Zamorano, M. M. 2016. Reframing Cultural Diplomacy, *Culture Unbound* 8, 166-186, p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> Rivera, T. 2015. op. cit., p.11.

<sup>26</sup> British Council and Goethe Institut. 2018. Cultural value. *Cultural Relations in societies in transition: a literature review*, p.11 [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/lit\\_review\\_short\\_working\\_paper\\_final\\_final.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/lit_review_short_working_paper_final_final.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Batora, J. & Hocking, B. 2008. *Bilateral diplomacy in the EU: towards postmodern patterns?*, Clingendael Discussion Papers in Diplomacy.

<sup>28</sup> Melissen, J. 2005. *The new public diplomacy: soft power in international relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 22.

cultural difference through mass communication approaches. In this sense, while states rely on their hierarchical structures 'to wield their soft power resources', the EU could use a 'network communication approach to create soft power'.<sup>29</sup> The EU should attempt to cultivate cultural understandings and help create a better climate of international trust through ICR by focusing on two-way communications that can enhance its credibility as a global actor.

As individual case studies have revealed,<sup>30</sup> the more distance between a cultural diplomatic action and governmental agency, the more likely it is to succeed among the target audiences. Also, the more inclusive of non-state actors the strategy is, the more likely it is to be sustainable and therefore successful.<sup>31</sup>

The EU ICR strategy should step back from one-sided, nation-centric CD approaches and see culture as an inherently relational, dialogic and collaborative process. Since the cultural values of the EU do not amount to a common 'European cultural persona',<sup>32</sup> the EU ICR should focus on creating a 'partnership of cultures'<sup>33</sup> enabling and facilitating a platform for people-to-people cooperation.<sup>34</sup>

In this way the EU can provide an added-value in the field of ICR by reinforcing intercultural dialogue, counteracting the negative images certain MS have in the world and being an instrument of conflict resolution. EU ICR 'enhanced cooperation' should also focus on building a space for creativity, networking and new partnerships in those areas of the world that lack technical and infrastructural capacity. By seeing itself primarily as a facilitator, the EU ICR should harmonize cultural differences without erasing them and lay the emphasis on projects that have a European dimension.<sup>35</sup> By decentralizing power and resources, the EU can avoid suspicions in the use of culture in external relations and thus be able to manage more effectively today's international environment.

ICR, therefore, seems naturally more suitable to a regional integration project like the EU, whose experience, knowledge and practice on intercultural dialogue and capacity building should be developed in their cooperation with partner countries. In this sense, the EU should build upon its experience in the three work streams identified in the 2016 Communication and seek an ever-increasing co-ownership with target countries. The 2017 partnership arrangement constitutes a good basis for such an approach.<sup>36</sup>

Engaging with this statement, the next session provides an analysis of the main internal and external variables that could affect the emergence of a structured policy in the near future.

### 3. The future of EU ICR: SWOT analysis and future scenarios

#### 3.1 Internal and external politico-security variables

A reading of the EL-CSID publications and other relevant CD and cultural relations literature points at a few possible internal and external variables affecting the development of an EU ICR. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis can help organise these variables and identify simplified scenarios.

The *Strengths* and *Weaknesses* of ICR can be approached as positive and negative variables of one local, internal factor, namely 'support and involvement of the relevant EU 'policy entrepreneurs' in a common strategic framework for ICR' (EU MS, cultural institutes, EC services and EEAS, cultural networks, foundations and others.). See table 1

Culture is mainly a MS' competence, with the EU only having a supplementary role (Articles 6 and 167.3 TFEU). While CD is largely set to remain a national prerogative, the policy formulation process on EU ICR aims to create an 'enhanced cooperation' with MS, be it at the level of national cultural institutes or foreign ministries in their cultural competences. A strategic approach to this cooperation still needs to be clearly defined and supported by EU MS. A set of principles, priorities and

---

<sup>29</sup> Zaharna, R. S. 2007. The soft power differential: network communication and mass communication, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 2, 213-228, p. 226.

<sup>30</sup> Gienow-Hecht, J.C.E. & Donfried, M. C. (eds.). 2010. The Model of Cultural Diplomacy: Power, Distance, and the Promise of Civil Society, in: *Searching for a Cultural Diplomacy*, Berghen Books, pp. 13-29.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p.23.

<sup>32</sup> Higgott, R. & Langenhove, L. 2016. Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations: An initial, critical but constructive analysis. EL-CSID Policy Brief 2016/1, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Ang, I., Raj Isar, Y. & Mar, P. 2015. *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Fisher, R. 2007. A Cultural Dimension to the EU's External Policies: From Policy Statements to Practice and Potential, *Boekman Studies*, pp. 34-39.

<sup>36</sup> Trobbiani, R. 2017. EU Cultural Diplomacy: time to define strategies, means and complementarity with Member States, EL-CSID Policy Brief 2017/02, p.4.

practical arrangements was laid out by EUNIC, the EC and EEAS,<sup>37</sup> but the extent of their implementation remains to be demonstrated and constitutes a source of uncertainty. The key question is to what extent EU MS will back up a common strategic approach and implement enhanced cooperation in third countries.

One risk is that competitive visions of the role of culture in external relations prevail over cooperative ones among MS. Inclusive cultural relations naturally create a better basis for cooperation within the EU, as synergies are easier to identify. This relates to visions of the role of culture in external relations at the global level, which will be analysed as external variables later in this section. Cooperation among EU MS might result easier in cultural relations with developing countries, where common approaches have been piloted in the framework of development assistance, capacity building, intercultural dialogue. However, relations with developed and emerging economies are often characterised by more narrow understandings of CD as self-promotion, cultural display and competition for the host country's political, economic and cultural attention.<sup>38</sup>

However, doubts also apply to the EC and its services, EEAS and the European Parliament. Standing in between the current eagerness for a common European approach to ICR and its interiorisation and implementation there is a fundamental political factor: the role of informal attitudes in the EU policy making decision process. Due to the nature of the EU as a fragmented multi-governance system with differentiated competences according to policy area, decisions are often formulated informally in an ad-hoc fashion in response to specific problems<sup>39</sup> and usually depend on the personal attitudes of the EU officials.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, Pietro de Perini<sup>41</sup> has concluded that change and continuity in the promotion of intercultural dialogue within the EU in the period 1990-2016 heavily depended on the personal attitudes of EU officials. Under the current term, the leadership of HRVP Mogherini and the support of Commissioner Navracsics have been central in bringing culture in external relations higher on the agenda. However, there are no guarantees that the next EC will be interested in EU-level cooperation in external cultural relations. Furthermore, after the European elections in May 2019, a European Parliament and Commission with a larger component of Eurosceptic political forces engaged in identity politics are less likely to insure the level of political commitment that this still nascent initiative would need to strengthen its strategy and instruments.

Another important internal weakness is the impact of Brexit on ICR. Three are the biggest risks for the EU in a post-Brexit context: first, the loss of capability, expertise, and networks in theory and practice of ICR that the UK currently provides; secondly, reduced opportunities for study and work in the UK in the light of a potential no-deal scenario; and, thirdly, the loss of access to the UK's research and innovation centres. Particularly, the UK's withdrawal as a full member of EUNIC is a possibility. Should the UK leave or become an associate member, the future implementation of ICR, which is largely based upon a partnership between EUNIC, the EEAS, and the EC, would be significantly weakened without 'the funding and leadership provided by what is arguably the world's most successful and innovative cultural relations agency: the British Council'.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the UK could become a competitor and not a partner in the field of ICR.

The limits of the future 'enhanced cooperation' are also found in dynamics which are internal to the MS themselves. While it has been argued that the capacity of engaging in mutual cultural relations and building trust with third countries depends on the arm's length status of cultural institutes,<sup>43</sup> recent years and the spreading of realpolitik approaches have seen an attempt by many governments to reduce the autonomy of such institutes and control their operations.<sup>44</sup> This means that the EU must avoid proposing an additional level of political control, clarifying its role of support and coordination.

Agreement on a common EU strategic framework for cooperation is also needed from other key stakeholders working with European cultural relations. This includes key networks of public and private cultural foundations and associations, individual foundations, universities, museums and others. Also, an active involvement and support by the community of professionals in cultural relations that have managed or received funding and assistance from European and national programmes is fundamental to their evaluation and reformulation in the new ICR framework. If this debate remains

---

<sup>37</sup> EC, EEAS and EUNIC. 2017. op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> Trobbiani, R. & Schunz, S. 2018. The European Union's Multi-Level Cultural Diplomacy vis-à-vis the United States of America, UNU-CRIS WPS 2018/7.

<sup>39</sup> Tatenhove, J., Mak, J. & Liefferink, D. 2006. The inter-play between formal and informal practices, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 7(1), 8-24.

<sup>40</sup> La Porte, T. and Pavón-Guinea, A. (2017) Considering cities' role in a European Union multi-level governance context: an assessment of officials' attitudes, *European Politics and Society* 19(1), 49-62.

<sup>41</sup> de Perini, P. 2018. *Intercultural dialogue in EU foreign policy*, Routledge.

<sup>42</sup> MacDonald, S. 2017. The Impact of Brexit on International Cultural Relations in the European Union, ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy, p. 39.

<sup>43</sup> Rose, M. & Wadham-Smith, N. 2004. Mutuality, trust and cultural relations, Counterpoint Report.

<sup>44</sup> Rose, M. 2017. op. cit., p.1.

within the community of practitioners and key stakeholders in Brussels, as it has largely been, there will be a lack of ownership and trust in its implementation.

A final internal weakness is currently constituted by the retreat of liberal values in many European countries in the context of a growing 'populist-nationalist zeitgeist',<sup>45</sup> with Hungary and Poland constituting most worrying cases among others. The rise of nationalist and populist discourse and politics constitutes the new environment in which ICR would have to operate. These '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 member states, and indeed of the EU as a foreign policy actor in its own right'.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, populism questions the basic assumptions of cultural policy since it directly highlights the exclusionary and competitive character of culture<sup>47</sup> by capitalizing on the politics of fear towards others who are ethno-culturally different.<sup>48</sup> As a result, the context in which ICR might operate is characterized by the rise of right and left-wing populist parties within the EU, whose cultural policies are rooted in a sense of nostalgia about the distant past where the nation-State was ethnically homogeneous. This highlights an extremely competitive use of culture, which reacts to the alleged threats coming from outside enemies, be it globalization, Islam, the EU itself or refugees.<sup>49</sup> This internal weakness, along with the poor handling of the migration crisis, demonstrates little coherence between the EU and its professed values as a whole. This leads to a fundamental question which constitutes a further source of uncertainty, namely, what image can the EU project abroad in terms of culture, if it questions its own cultural and political achievements internally?

The *Opportunities* and *Threats* could also be collapsed into positive and negative answers, respectively, to a variable or driver of change in the macro-environment: 'Global consensus on the role of cultural relations as mutual engagement between countries, co-creation, co-ownership and intercultural dialogue' (see table 1, p. 10).

Internationally, Europe is perceived as an attractive pole for its rich cultural heritage and production. A 2015 study<sup>50</sup> on the external perceptions of the EU and its policies surveyed the EU's ten strategic partner countries and found confirmation of the great attractiveness of European culture in fields as diverse as history, music, theatre, cinema, monuments, museums, modern architecture, design, food and cuisine and more. These perceptions, however, mostly referred to 'Europe', and the EU as an institution was hardly recognised as a cultural actor. When asked to associate the topic of 'culture and sports' with either 'EU' or 'Europe' only 17,6% of the global respondents to the survey picked the EU, while 49,1% indicated 'Europe', 20,7% stated that there is no difference between them and 12,6% could not answer.<sup>51</sup> Compared to 'politics', 'economy', 'social development' and 'science, research and technology' – 'culture and sports' was the topic least often associated with the EU.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that the EU is not perceived as a self-standing cultural actor with an artistic and creative production to display externally.

Therefore, in an ideal scenario for effective EU ICR, there would be a prevalent global conception of the use of culture as an instrument for cooperative relations and exchange between countries, rather than an instrument of unilateral communication, showcasing or, at worst, propaganda. As noted by Martin Rose, we live in an era of 'culturisation of international politics', characterised by 'the replacement of old-fashioned politics [e.g. class-based] with much more culturally defined identities'.<sup>53</sup> This makes cultural relations ever more important.<sup>54</sup> It must be mentioned that the resurgence of hard power capabilities as a determining factor shaping relations between states seem to undermine the promise of soft power, and culture therein, as a tool shaping international politics.<sup>55</sup> However, an answer to this apparent contradiction lies the conception of these cultural relations and the role assigned to culture globally: as a mere instrument for other goals (e.g. political, economic) or as a tool of open-ended and bi-directional communication and co-creation to build trust and cultural

---

<sup>45</sup> Higgott, R. & Proud, V. 2017. *Populist Nationalism and Foreign Policy: Cultural Diplomacy and Resilience*, ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy.

<sup>46</sup> Higgott, R. 2017. *op. cit.*, p.4.

<sup>47</sup> Ada, S. 2018. Foreword, in: Ada, S. et al. (eds.) *Rise of Populism and the Crisis of Political Pragmatism*, Cultural Policy and Management Research Centre.

<sup>48</sup> Kaya, A. 2018. Mainstreaming of Right-Wing Populism in Europe, in: Ada, S. et al. (eds.) *Rise of Populism and the Crisis of Political Pragmatism*, Cultural Policy and Management Research Centre.

<sup>49</sup> Rydgren, J. 2007. The sociology of the radical right, *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, 241-262.

<sup>50</sup> Public Policy and Management Institute, National Centre for Research on Europe & NFG Research Group. 2015. Analysis of the perception of the EU and of EU's policies abroad. Main Report, [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/showcases/eu\\_perceptions\\_study\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/showcases/eu_perceptions_study_en.htm).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*: Annex III, p. 114.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> Rose, M. 2017. *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>55</sup> Higgott, R. 2017. *op. cit.*



value.<sup>56</sup> While the EU can aim to a role of leadership in the latter environment, the former does not fit its nature of a supranational polity with a relatively recent institutional history and lacking a single culture to showcase. As already discussed, the EU is better equipped for inclusive cultural relations, notably in the framework of development cooperation.<sup>57</sup> When it comes to competitive visions of culture as showcasing of national production in the context of narrow CD, the EU struggles to find a role and added value compared to its MS. Of course, EU Open Days, EU cinema fairs and similar events constitute positive example of European collaboration, but often consist of a limited physical or temporal space bringing together individual national products. Although positive and useful to maximise MS's impacts and perceptions of the richness of EU cultural production, these events hardly bring a cultural value that constitutes more than the sum of its components. Most importantly, they do not maximise the potential that culture has to bring about social, economic and political transformations and EU's leadership therein. In a global context where mutual and inclusive cultural relations prevail, the EU has higher chances to succeed, presenting itself as both an embodiment of a shared history and as the natural defendant of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

Developing an ICR approach does not mean that the EU should neglect the existence of spaces of competition in the cultural field, especially concerning rising economic and cultural powers, or related to specific geographical areas. As an example of the former, the rise of China has been accompanied by a surprising expansion of its network of Confucius institutes around the world.<sup>58</sup> As for the latter, regions which perceive the power of attraction of European culture and norms are at times also targeted by other actors with alternative models and narratives. For example, EU and its MS's attempts to support cultural and higher education relations with Central Asia hardly match the role of leadership and influence of Russia in the region, rooted in stronger cultural and historical ties as well as resources invested.<sup>59</sup> Some countries have progressively emerged for the capacity to harness their cultural attractiveness and promote their cultural production internationally, like Japan and South Korea. Even in smaller and developing countries, structured approaches to CD have started to emerge, for instance in the case of the Philippines.<sup>60</sup> Taking a broader view on CD and cultural relations in the digital era, the US predominance in ICT through giants like Google, Amazon, Facebook or Apple belittles European efforts in this fundamental sector, which functions as an important media for culture in a broad sense. The EU cannot take on these challenges by playing by the rules on traditional CD as competition and struggle for influence. Not only this is hindered by its nature of multi-national and multi-cultural polity, but it would also be detrimental if the EU wants to change external perception of Europe in developing countries, especially former European colonies, as a self-interested, intrusive neo-colonial actor. Even in competitive CD scenarios, the best approach for the EU is to step up its engagement in ICR, aiming to become a pole of attraction for independent players in the cultural fields and those countries, especially developing ones, which are attracted by the promise of human and social development that culture can help bring about. This requires a 'remapping' of the language and contents transmitted by the EU, which risk being based on post-colonial universalisation of its own values and model, by assessing the perception of target audiences.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, there is a broader challenge concerning the changing role of traditional ICR leaders in the digital era. The national cultural institutes like the British Council, Goethe-Institut, Cervantes, and even more dramatically smaller ones, progressively see their control over their country's image abroad diminish in the ever-growing flow of digital communications and fast evolution of ICTs. Of course, the importance of face-to-face interactions in areas like promotion and exposition of arts and the control of official certificates in language learning are likely to keep them afloat in the future. However, their role as the main gatekeepers of a country's image abroad is substantially undermined and can only partly be compensated by their engagement on social media or in e-learning, as this remains a drop in the ocean of uncontrolled and fast-paced communications concerning their countries' cultural activities. Digital transformation and ICT occupy a very minor place in the EU's discussion concerning ICR, and this seriously undermines the range, durability and overall impact of such an approach.

Having outlined the main internal Strengths and Weaknesses and external Opportunities and Treats, the next sections presents the matrix resulting from this exercise (Table 1) and shortly elaborates on the scenarios identified.

---

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Rose, M. & Wadham-Smith, N. 2004. op. cit.

<sup>57</sup> See Helly, D. & Galeazzi, G. 2016. Culture in EU development policies and external action: Reframing the discussion, ECDPM Briefing Note 92.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2018-11-30/chart-of-the-day-the-growth-of-chinas-confucius-institutes-101354066.html>

<sup>59</sup> Valenza, D. & Boers, E. 2018. Assessing the Effectiveness of the EU's and Russia's Cultural Diplomacy towards Central Asia, EL-CSID Working Paper 2018/9.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.fsi.gov.ph/philippine-cultural-diplomacy-unraveling-its-full-potential/>

<sup>61</sup> Higgott, R. 2017. op. cit., p. 7.

### 3.2 Four scenarios facing EU ICR and CD

Trying to fit these complex variables into a simple SWOT matrix is clearly a simplification and a heuristic device to stimulate reflection on future scenarios. The future might possibly resemble one option more than the others, but it will likely consist of a mix of these scenarios. Also, what should be clearly stated is that the stakes are higher than the developments in the field of ICR. At broader level, the EU needs to survive to the centripetal forces that are tarnishing its very existence. Global and regional transition dynamics and the weakening of the international liberal order are challenging the authority and mandate of the EU. This does not make a foresight exercise less valuable, as its final aim is to advocate for EU's preparedness to each of these scenarios or a mix thereof. The development of capabilities in using culture in its external relations should be seen as an additional instrument in the hands of the EU to face these challenges, not as a magic stick able to build trust and understanding irrespective of the context in which it operates. Also, the external and internal dimensions are inextricably linked. The emergence of this policy, based on liberal values and assumptions, cannot take place while ignoring nationalist and populist developments within the EU. This also means acknowledging that some of the public concern about the loss of cultural identities cannot be dismissed as nationalist rhetoric.<sup>62</sup> Internally, it is therefore needed to 'build robust cultural resilience (and confidence) at a national level (...) and reassure citizens that the EU as a cultural, as well as an economic and legislative entity is not a threat to national identity'.<sup>63</sup>

The matrix in Table 1 outlines four different scenarios by crossing the internal strength and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats outlined above.

Table 1: S.W.O.T. of EU International Cultural Relations

Internal	<b>Weaknesses:</b> EU policy entrepreneurs (EU MS, national cultural institutes, EC services, EEAS and others) <b>NOT</b> committed to enhanced cooperation in EU ICR.	<b>Strengths:</b> EU policy entrepreneurs (EU MS, national cultural institutes, EC services, EEAS and others) committed to enhanced cooperation in EU ICR.
External		
<b>Opportunities:</b> Global use of inclusive and mutual cultural relations, capacity building and intercultural dialogue. <sup>64</sup> Adaptation of traditional cultural actors to new ICT and multi-actoriness.	<i>Sub-Optimal scenario 1:</i> No EU leadership in ICR. Poor advancement of EU external policy objectives through culture. EU increasingly inward-looking, struggling to adapt to positive global developments. Only few EU MS engage in ICR.	<i>Optimal scenario:</i> EU leadership in ICR. Advancement of EU external policy objectives through culture, especially in development cooperation. Adaptation to changing internal and external contexts.
<b>Threats:</b> Global use of Cultural Diplomacy as showcasing and unilateral display of national culture. Lack of adaptation of traditional cultural actors to new ICT and multi-actoriness.	<i>Worst scenario:</i> No EU leadership in ICR. No advancement of EU external policy objectives through culture. Limited EU cooperation on joint CD.	<i>Sub-optimal scenario 2:</i> Possible EU leadership in ICR, based on its capacity to attract emerging and non-state actors. Possible advancement of EU external policy objectives through culture, especially in development cooperation. Possible strategic adaptation to global developments.

**Optimal scenario: EU leadership in ICR. Advancement of EU external policy objectives through culture, especially in development cooperation. Adaptation to changing internal and external contexts.**

In ideal conditions, an internal consensus on bringing forward enhanced cooperation on ICR would be matched globally by a stronger understanding of culture as an instrument of mutual engagement, co-creation, dialogue and sustainable development. The EU would be ideally placed to assume a role of leadership and coordination in this context, where its multi-cultural character would make it a less

<sup>62</sup> Higgott, R. & Proud, V. 2017. op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, p. 77.

<sup>64</sup> EC. 2016. op. cit.

controversial interlocutor for states and non-state actors in multilateral initiatives. The EU could emerge as a potential leader by framing its narratives and actions on the support of cultural diversity and promotion of the 2005 UNESCO Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. After all, the EU itself embodies a success story in protecting diversity and fostering inter-cultural dialogue. This would also facilitate the role of culture in development policies, as the EU could progressively build better trust with cultural actors in former European colonies and the broader developing world. Impact on EU's external policy objectives would be maximised in a context where more resources would be invested and pooled to support culture in human and economic development, inter-cultural dialogue and building of resilient communities in the EU Neighbourhood and elsewhere. This regained clarity over EU's role in coordinating and supporting collective efforts in ICR would reassure MS on their untouched competences in the field of CD and ensure support for developing innovative models for cooperation in EUNIC clusters. Understanding the importance of cultural relations would be accompanied by enduring, at least to some extent, arm's length relations between key cultural institutes and other actors and their governments, with an even more remote support role for the EU. Ideally, this coalition should keep pace with advancements in ICT and find a relevant space in the expanded cultural relations.

**Sub-Optimal scenario 1: No EU leadership in ICR. Poor advancement of EU external policy objectives through culture. EU increasingly inward-looking, struggles to adapt to positive global developments. Only few EU MS engage in ICR.**

EU's narrative of leadership and exemplarity in a world order based on multilateralism and liberal values persisted during much of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, and has focused on fields of democracy, social and civil rights, economic welfare, but has also played on the richness of European cultural heritage and production. In a world where cultural communications are dominated by technologies largely mastered and defined by the US and emerging economies, the EU could remain stuck in old-fashioned showcasing of national cultures which speaks to limited audiences. Also, the current populist and nationalist wave in the US and in some other partner countries – which are still perceived by many European observers as contrasting with the persistent liberal character of Europe – might deflate and make clearer that much of the challenge to liberal values comes from within the EU, embodied by populist and nationalist politics and anti-EU and anti-immigration sentiments. Some EU MS could still play an important and positive role in cultural relations on the global stage, but European action would remain fragmented and impact underexploited. European cooperation in third countries could still happen, for instance among larger cultural institutes in developing countries. However, smaller cultural institutes would likely remain marginal, thus undermining the true European nature of these initiatives. Also, action would remain dependent on preferential ties between single EU MS and their former colonies or other countries of interest. This is likely not to have a transformative impact on the external perceptions of Europe as a post-colonial power, which could more easily be dispelled by a multilateral and chiefly civilian actor like the EU. The untouched strategic importance of purely national efforts could be accompanied, also depending on the evolution of the political climate, by a further centralisation of functions and control by national governments, which risks making cultural cooperation even more subject to political interests.

**Sub-optimal scenario 2: Possible EU leadership in ICR, based on its capacity to attract emerging and non-state actors. Possible advancement of EU external policy objectives through culture, especially in development cooperation. Possible strategic adaptation to global developments.**

As the debate on enhanced cooperation on EU ICR unfolds, there is a possibility that growing European consensus on joint action will take place in a global context where the rules of the game increasingly value public diplomacy, display of national culture to gain influence and change foreign perceptions up until outright cultural propaganda. In this context, the EU's enhanced cooperation, which is being designed to focus on cooperative aspects of cultural relations rather than showcasing, could be marginalised and only remain relevant in some areas of development cooperation. The EU would receive increasing incentives to develop a stronger public diplomacy and strategic communications strategy of its own: countering Russian propaganda by similar channels, communicating the benefits of EU integration more assertively within and outside the EU and relaunching its image as a civilian and normative power. Nevertheless, it would constitute a risk to lose sight of the fact that, in general terms, the EU is poorly equipped for this job compared to nation states: few EU-level audio-visual media to channel its messages, a fragmented European public debate to discuss and amplify them, a multiplicity of languages and cultures to inclusively balance in external communications, complex politics and policies to communicate correctly to non-informed audiences and similar hurdles. A possible solution to this would be an even stronger investment on and publicization of inclusive cultural relations, especially in cooperation with developing and least developed countries. Becoming the leader in using cultural cooperation in developing policies, in a context where other developed countries disinvest in these aspects, could grant an even stronger EU role in a revived UNESCO and similar fora and an

attractive position vis-à-vis emerging countries. This could ideally be facilitated by a stronger use of ICT, capitalising on digital transformation for increased inter-cultural dialogue and cultural co-creation with third countries.

**Worst scenario: No EU leadership in ICR. No advancement of EU external policy objectives through culture. Limited EU cooperation on joint CD.**

The worst-case scenario is one of synchronic dissociation of EU and global politics and policies from the use of culture as an instrument for exchange a cooperation among equal partners. In a context where social media and new communication channels are increasingly used to shape the image of a country, culture risks becoming even more an instrument of strategic communications and propaganda towards broad and diverse audiences. Parts of this scenarios are already visible today. One example can be found in the field of sports, where Russian and particularly Chechen leaders have been strongly investing in the participation of athletes in disciplines of rising popularity like Mixed Martial Arts,<sup>65</sup> conveying an image of strength and traditional masculinity worldwide. In this context, EU MS would lose interest in enhanced cooperation, rather investing in traditional showcasing and trying to retain control over CD activities. On the one hand by using new technologies to serve their communication interests. On the other, by further bringing cultural institutes under their political control. Culture would progressively cease to be an important instrument for dialogue and development cooperation. At most, cultural showcasing could be increasingly used to polish the tainted images of European countries in the context of post-colonial relations, in an attempt to manipulate foreign perceptions. In such a scenario, there would be little space left for EU ICR which could be, without too much publicity, still funded through EU programmes on complementary topics like human rights or economic and social development, granted that the EU will remain a strong development cooperation actor, or similarly addressed in policies on which the EU retains larger competences (e.g. Trade policies).

#### 4. Learning from future scenarios: key actors and the importance of subsidiarity

Whichever future scenario will prevail, this foresight analysis endorses the current policy developments: investing in stronger EU cooperation in ICR, rather than CD, remains the best solution for EU leadership. A fundamental variable for success will be the EC and EEAS' ability to attract and support relevant actors or 'policy entrepreneurs', chiefly EU MS and their cultural institutes, in the definition and implementation of a strategic approach for enhanced cooperation. This process has been rightly set to hinge upon a 'strategic approach',<sup>66</sup> where the noun communicates the intention to leave freedom and room for manoeuvre to the stakeholders involved. As pointed out by EUNIC Global 'This new *strategic approach* is not yet a *strategy* since the principles and priorities it outlines do not yet have a plan for implementation, however it is a departure from traditional Cultural Diplomacy'.<sup>67</sup>

Coherently with this approach, EU institutions' discourse on CD should come to end, making clear that the EU is not developing a policy in this direction. The EU is structurally more gifted to be an ICR actor, championing cultural diversity and cultural dialogue. A central piece of EU's discourse and practices on ICR is its commitment to the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The cooperative and mutual character of ICR, best implemented with developing countries, also facilitates consensus-building and cooperation within the EU, in a context where the added value of coordination is easier to understand, for example in development assistance.

The 2016 Communication cites a series of actors potentially involved in this strategic approach for stronger culture in EU external relations, notably MS's national institutes and EUNIC clusters, EU Delegations, partner countries and their civil society.<sup>68</sup> Clearly, the main focus here is on pooling the resources managed by the EC and by EU MS and their cultural institutes on a voluntary basis for common objectives. A basic mapping of the institutional and non-institutional actors currently involved in this process – at very differing degrees and only potentially in some cases – is presented by Figure 1, organised on three levels.

---

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2018/sep/29/ramzan-kadyrov-ufc-chechnya-dictator>

<sup>66</sup> Council of the EU. 2015. Outcome of 3428th Council Meeting: Education Youth Culture and Sport, Brussels, 23-24/11/2015.

<sup>67</sup> EUNIC Global. 2018. Report on the current state of the partnership between EUNIC clusters & EU Delegations, Bruxelles, p. 17, emphasis added.

<sup>68</sup> EC. 2016. op. cit., pp. 13-14.

Figure 1: Key actors in EU ICR



Source: authors' compilation

Most responsibilities lie with the so-called legislative triangle (Commission, Council and European Parliament), which of course has a formal role in defining EU legislation, both soft (e.g. Communications/strategies like the 2016 Communication) and hard (e.g. regulation establishing the next Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, Creative Europe). In practice, the main actors 'courted' by this new approach are EU MS and their cultural institutes, as they have the main resources for implementation. In this context the EU can use its funding programmes to provide spaces and means for this enhanced cooperation, pooling resources with MS and leaving them more and more responsibility in the implementation, for example through EU-funded projects managed by EUNIC clusters. For the moment, EU MS have been supportive of the new approach. The Council endorsed the 2016 Communication<sup>69</sup> and included ICR as one of five priorities of the *Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022* it adopted in 2018.<sup>70</sup> The *Council Conclusions on an EU Strategic Approach to ICR* activated a body to work together at the level of Council comitology: a 'Friends of the Presidency Group' to 'draw up an integrated, comprehensive and step-by-step EU strategic approach to International Cultural Relations that explores synergies across all relevant policy areas in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity'.<sup>71</sup> In June 2018 this group published a *Report on certain elements of the future EU strategic approach to International Cultural Relations*.<sup>72</sup> The report seems ambitious in defining the potential content and impact of the future strategy on EU's global role, calling for a mainstreaming of ICR in EU external relations. It reiterated the need to base the new strategic approach on the three strands identified by the 2016 Communication, and particularly focused on protection and valorisation of cultural heritage, mobility and people-to-people exchange and culture in development cooperation. It also suggested the need to define the role of the different actors involved like the Council, the MS, the Commission and the European External Action Service, while identifying complementarity and subsidiarity as fundamental principles. The work of the FoP will now be taken forward by the Council (Cultural Affairs Committee), which is expected to adopt a strategic approach in the second half on 2019, by gathering the relevant stakeholders and experts from different sectors.<sup>73</sup>

Alongside the policy-making process, EUNIC and the national institutes for culture – with a prominent role of Goethe and British Council among others – produced studies, reports, debates and actively worked together in third countries to implement innovative projects based on stronger

<sup>69</sup> Council of the EU. 2017. Council conclusions on an EU strategic approach to international cultural relations, Brussels, 23/05/2017.

<sup>70</sup> Council of the EU. 2018. op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Council of the EU. 2017. op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Friends of the Presidency Group. 2018. Report on certain elements of the future EU strategic approach to international cultural relations, Brussels, 20/06/2018.

<sup>73</sup> Council of the EU. 2018. op. cit.

cooperation and pilots for the future strategic approach. Innovative projects with stronger cooperation at the level of EUNIC clusters were established in third countries, mostly in the EU Neighbourhood. Tunisia and Ukraine, where 2 PAGO<sup>74</sup> contracts of 4 and 1.4 Million Euro respectively entrust the EUNIC clusters with the implementation of financial and technical assistance projects to local actors, constitute best practices of advanced cooperation in the spirit of the 2016 Communication.<sup>75</sup> Also, pilot projects were foreseen by the 2017 administrative arrangement to help test methods of enhanced cooperation between clusters and EU delegations in third countries and explore innovative financing and partnership models.<sup>76</sup> More recently, EU funding has been provided to allow EUNIC to pilot the establishment of European Culture Houses and is expected to report on this concept at the end of 2019.<sup>77</sup>

Looking at recent developments, the EU seems to be moving on the right path, focusing on domains which are compatible with EU's nature as a cultural actor and its expertise as an institution. In general, what is important is that the EC maintains a role of coordination and support without being too intrusive in EU MS prerogatives, especially in CD, which at this point is set to remain outside of enhanced cooperation. Another layer of independence to be safeguarded is that between this new EU level of governance in ICR and cultural institutes, which already struggle to keep arm's length relations with their own national governments. As ICR as a tool to build trust and mutual understanding best thrives when free of political control and labels, the EC should present itself as a non-intrusive supporter and convener of cultural exchanges. As noted by Martin Rose, 'supra-national bodies, and the EU in particular, offer one possible answer to the question of location. The tightening lock of national government policy, in some cases at least, over cultural relations could in principle be loosened by collaboration, partnership and a pooling of resources under the ægis of the EC, always of course subject to the subsidiarity principle'.<sup>78</sup> Subsidiarity, a concept which is reiterated in EU documents on ICR, especially by the Council, also becomes a key factor in insuring arm's length relations between MS and their cultural institutions.

In this spirit, the inclusion of actors in an enhanced cooperation in ICR should not be limited to MS. As highlighted by Higgott and Proud, the development of EU ICR needs both a bottom-up and top-down approach.<sup>79</sup> A lasting and resilient strategy requires the inclusion of actors at all levels besides the Brussels-based European networks of foundations, museums, theatres etc. Activating the interest and participation of national and local cultural actors in the emergence of a new European cultural policy is fundamental for its definition and successful implementation. Hopefully the Council will broaden the field of stakeholder who have a say in the new strategy, ideally listening also to experts from EU's key partner countries, especially in the EU neighbourhood.

## 5. Conclusion and policy recommendations

The future of EU International Cultural Relations will depend upon factors which this policy paper presented as internal and external to the EU. In reality, they influence each other and transcend political borders. The rise of populist and nationalist forces takes place both within and outside Europe. The global nature of the challenges humanity faces in terms of trust, tolerance and education affect in different ways all countries and transversally impact our capacity to achieve sustainable development. Hard power seems to be gaining prominence over soft power and persuasion. Uses of soft power (and propaganda) persist in the framework of identity politics, where culture is increasingly regarded as a set of national features defined in oppositions to others, rather than a tool for dialogue and cooperation. In whatever direction these factors evolve, the foresight analysis presented in this paper points at a key finding: *investing in stronger EU cooperation in International Cultural Relations, rather than Cultural Diplomacy, remains the best solution for EU leadership.* An EU strategic approach to International Cultural Relations rooted in development policy and inter-cultural dialogue bears the promise to facilitate cooperation among EU institutions, member states and their cultural institutes, as well as broader cultural networks based on innovative models. Concerning EU policy goals, an approach based on subsidiarity and arm's length relations with cultural actors can serve EU's interests better than a top-down Cultural Diplomacy. Building economic, social and human development as well as trust and peaceful relations with third countries starting from the European Neighbourhood are EU's key priorities, all aims to which ICR can potentially contribute, depending on the size and quality of resources invested.

---

<sup>74</sup> Pillar Assessed Grant or Delegation Agreements.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>76</sup> EC, EEAS and EUNIC. 2017. op. cit.

<sup>77</sup> EUNIC Global. 2018. op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>78</sup> Rose, M. 2017. op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Higgott, R. & Proud, V. 2017. op. cit.

However, a series of criticalities could potentially affect this emerging policy, which calls for some recommendations on the process and content of the approach under development.

First, **there is a need for conceptual clarity**. As explained in this paper, despite the clear direction taken by the debate on enhanced cooperation on ICR, some attachment on the side of EU institutions to the term Cultural Diplomacy remains. If the European Commission and EEAS feel that there is a need for stronger strategic communications and more assertive policies in fields of competition with other powers, e.g. in counter-acting propaganda from countries like Russia, a separate approach should be developed. Importantly, it should be made clear that these are two different things. This more assertive aspect could be incorporated into a separate EU strategic communications strategy, comprising initiatives like the creation of East StratCom Task Force to fight Russian disinformation. Indeed, ICR themselves can play a role in counter-acting populist and nationalist discourse and propaganda.<sup>80</sup> However, this is a process which requires public support but mostly grows organically with building trust, cultural capacities and education. The EU should be wary to excessively display its label in supporting ICR with this goal. This risks hindering rather than helping EU objectives, undermining the credibility and perception of these policies.

Second, it is advisable that the concept of 'culture' does not reproduce a logic of security in the design and implementation of ICR. **The use of culture in international relations should not fall into the logic of Huntington's clash of civilizations'** thesis where cultures 'appear as quasi-ontological units that relate to a specific conflictual structural disposition and legitimize specific interpretations of regional and international politics'.<sup>81</sup> Cultural difference should better reflect the thinking behind the discourse on the 'unity in diversity' whereby cultures are understood as sources of cooperation and not as causes of conflict. In this sense, it would be recommendable to avoid defining what ICR are in strict and formal terms, since its meaning will differ across Europe and beyond.<sup>82</sup>

Third, **the new approach should strongly learn from the lessons of advanced EUNIC clusters and adapt existing resources in EU headquarters and delegations**. With regard to the models for enhanced cooperation between EUNIC clusters and EU delegations in third countries, important lessons learned and recommendations were provided by the 2018 *Report on the current state of the partnership between EUNIC clusters & EU Delegations*.<sup>83</sup> Among other things, the report highlighted how the organisation of culture as a topic within the EUD influences the way in which culture in external relations is conceived: as strategic communication and/or political dialogue if managed within the Press and Information section, or as a tool for development if managed within the Cooperation section, which makes it more likely to be in line with the spirit of the 2016 Communication. Also, more support, guidelines and advice from headquarters of EUNIC, EUNIC members and EU are required to communicate and implement the new approach.<sup>84</sup>

Fourth, **the debate should be as inclusive as possible, keeping in mind that there will be a large set of actors implementing the new approach**, and they should be taken on board in the definition phase. This applies to smaller EU MS which have less capacities for ICR, for instance in terms of reach of their national cultural relations network. They are on average more willing to pool resources because they see a clear advantage in terms of increased visibility and reach. They are therefore more strongly pushing for the establishment of umbrella organizations such as the 'European Culture Houses' proposed by the 2016 Communication.<sup>85</sup> Also, it will be important to listen to European and key foreign cultural actors (e.g. working in the Mediterranean) which are not directly represented in Brussels, as many ministries of culture from third countries but also foundations, museums, theatres, libraries, universities will have an important role in the implementation phase. Civil society networks are understood to be a central feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world<sup>86</sup> and they are considered key for building cultural resilience and supporting cultural relations in the EU's internal and external engagement.<sup>87</sup> For example, the role of diaspora communities in maintaining cultural ties and constitute cultural networks should be further explored.<sup>88</sup> The EU should act as a public sphere, enabling the construction of spaces

---

<sup>80</sup> Higgott, R. & Proud, V. 2017. op. cit.

<sup>81</sup> Stetter, S. 2007. The politics of de-paradoxification in Euro-Mediterranean Relations: semantics and structures of cultural dialogue', in: Schumacher, T. & Pace, M. (eds.). *Conceptualizing cultural and social dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean area*, Taylor and Francis, p. 67.

<sup>82</sup> Higgott, R. 2017. op. cit., p.13.

<sup>83</sup> EUNIC Global. 2018. op. cit.

<sup>84</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>85</sup> Trobbiani, R. and Schunz, S. 2018. op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> Slaughter, A. M. 2017. *The chess board and the web: strategies for connection in an inter-connected world*, Yale University Press.

<sup>87</sup> Higgott, R. 2017. op. cit.

<sup>88</sup> Stone, D. & Douglas, E. 2018. Advance diaspora diplomacy in a networked world, *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 24(6), 710-723.

for cultures to interact in order to increase its legitimacy in ICR by decentralizing power and resources.<sup>89</sup> The inclusive, participatory and bottom-up definition and implementation phases of the UN 2030 Agenda could be taken as a best-practice example.

Fifth, **relations with strategic partners and more generally advanced and emerging economies needs specification.** While the 2016 Communication promised particular attention to EU's strategic partners,<sup>90</sup> which are mostly developed or emerging economic powers, most of the debate on EU ICR, including the best practices identified by EUNIC,<sup>91</sup> points at relations with developing countries, especially in the EU Neighbourhood. Coordination among EU MS is normally easier in the context of development assistance, where objectives can converge on topics like capacity building of the local cultural sector, economic and social development or inter-cultural dialogue. On the opposite, EUNIC members in countries like the US often invest in more traditional CD as cultural showcasing and display, competing for the host country's attention and mostly engaging in limited cooperation which consists of a 'sum of its parts': shared spaces for exposition of individual national production.<sup>92</sup> In developing a strategic approach, relationships with advanced and emerging economies should be also taken into account, by explaining what would be the added value of a EU enhanced cooperation, and what would be the role of EU instruments focusing on public diplomacy towards these countries, like the Partnership Instrument. Another possibility could be to leave these countries outside of the 'enhanced cooperation' approach. In this case, which is not advisable, it would still be better to state it explicitly instead of keeping silent on the issue and create false expectations.

Sixth, developing an innovative and impactful new external policy in the field of culture means **that a reflection must take place on the adaptation of cultural relations to ICT and digital transformation.** This has been almost inexistent in the current debate on ICR but cannot be avoided unless the EU wants to develop a strategic approach for a simply 'physical' cooperation, which would become increasingly limiting in the next decades. Technology offers unprecedented opportunities for the development of ICR due to its capacity to reach a global audience, increase awareness of each other's cultural backgrounds, and create new business models. Arts and culture have changed immensely with the digital revolution, and with 'the increasing use of social media, which has all but removed barriers to participation and exponentially extends the range of actors (official and otherwise) in international cultural relations'.<sup>93</sup> As ICR should be rooted in two-way communication, social media answers to its most basic needs of dialogue, collaboration, and engagement with the outside world.<sup>94</sup> Users are now able to co-produce, tailor and re-use the cultural content to better serve their needs for self-expression, community building, learning, and understanding. Within the EU, the examples of *crowdfunding4culture.eu* and *Europeana* are welcome developments in the application of digital technologies to ICR. However, there are also challenges that need to be addressed in this context. First, the use of big data and the protection of personal data become key.<sup>95</sup> Secondly, 'while we might see and know more about the cultures of others, it does not necessarily follow that we are better at understanding them, or that it leads to mutual respect and engagement'.<sup>96</sup> An emerging ICR strategic approach should be accompanied and preferably incorporate a clearer plan to use new channels of communication to boost its impact.

Finally, **evaluation mechanisms should be included at every stage of the policy-making process** since ICR are in 'constant need or re-mapping and checking with recipients'.<sup>97</sup> It is agreed that ICR and its aims of building cultural trust and understanding are valuable for a more cooperative and collaborative approach in international relations. However, demonstrating its impact and effectiveness requires strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The EU must be able to define the underlying mission and objectives of ICR, which audiences it aims to reach and how it will reach them. Planning should be data-driven and a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches with relevant analytical methods seem to be the most adequate approach to measuring the impact of ICR.<sup>98</sup> Particularly, the relevance of reliable cross-national measures is incontestable in the field of ICR. Transnational statistics

---

<sup>89</sup> Castells, M. 2008. The new public sphere: global civil society, communication networks, and global governance, *ANNALS AAPSS* 616(1), p.78

<sup>90</sup> EC. 2016. op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>91</sup> See EUNIC Global. 2018. op. cit.

<sup>92</sup> See Trobbiani, R. & Schunz, S. 2018. op. cit.

<sup>93</sup> Higgott, R. & Proud, V. 2017. op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>94</sup> Molema, S. 2015. Cultural Diplomacy in the Digital Age: How Social Media enhances Cultural Exchange between European Nations, paper presented at the conference 'The European Union and the Politicization of Europe', Prague, 27-28/11/2015.

<sup>95</sup> Karvonen, M., Kallman, R., de Niet, M. & Stepan, P. 2017. Promoting access to culture via digital means: policies and strategies for audience development, Final Report of the Working Group of EU Member States' Experts on promoting access to culture via digital means under the open method of coordination, European Union.

<sup>96</sup> Higgott, R. & Proud, V. 2017. op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>97</sup> Higgott, R. 2017. op. cit., p.7.

<sup>98</sup> Memis, S. 2009. The Impact of International Cultural Engagement: The British Council's Approach to Evaluation, *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 39(4), 292-297.



and indicators enable EU MS to share good practices and provide a global picture to design ICR based on evidence. In the current context, the development of harmonised cultural statistics is still in its infancy and it might be a sound approach to centralise at the EU level the funding of surveys and other methods to allow for a better control of standards and benefit from the vast translation facilities already available.<sup>99</sup> To support the strategic approach, there is a need for mappings of ICR and CD initiatives in place between third countries and the EU. They would not only highlight to the strengths and weaknesses of each relationship allowing for the adoption of ICR regional and country strategies, but also provide a baseline for evaluation which could then be reviewed every 3-5 years.<sup>100</sup>



**Riccardo Trobbiani** is Project Researcher at the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS). At UNU-CRIS, he enquires into the role of culture and science in EU external relations, including trade and development policies, within the EU-funded project 'European Leadership in Cultural, Science and Innovation Diplomacy' (EL-CSID). His main research interests include EU cultural relations with the MENA region, EU science diplomacy and the link between culture and development policies. He also has academic expertise and professional experience in the field of regional and local representation in the EU.



**Andrea Pavón-Guinea** is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Public Communication at the University of Navarra, where she currently teaches a course on international communication and public opinion. Her research focuses on the theory and practice of the European Union's public diplomacy, with a special focus on the MENA region. Andrea has been a visiting researcher at the Institute for European Studies in Brussels and has also recently published in journals such as the *Journal of International Communication* or *European Politics and Society*. Andrea holds a M.Sc. in Media and Communications from the London School of Economics and Political Science, as well as a B.A. in Politics from the University of Essex, and a second B.A. in Journalism from the University of Navarra.

---

<sup>99</sup> O'Hagan, J. 2016. European statistics on cultural participation and their international comparability, *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 22(2), 291-303.

<sup>100</sup> Murray, A. 2019. op. cit.

The EL-CSID project  
is coordinated  
by the  
Institute for European Studies (IES)  
[www.el-csid.eu](http://www.el-csid.eu)

Institute for European Studies  
Pleinlaan 5  
B-1050 Brussel  
T: +32 2 614 80 01  
E: [ies@vub.be](mailto:ies@vub.be)  
[www.ies.be](http://www.ies.be)



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