



The Cultural Dimension of Europe's external relations/foreign policy

23 June 2010, 18.30pm - Yehudi Menuhin Room, European Parliament

By invitation of Doris Pack, Chair of the Committee for Culture and Education of the European Parliament

One of Europe's greatest strengths is its cultural vitality. If European Union is to present itself effectively to the rest of the world, its cultural potential must be at the heart of its relations.

European culture – not merely the sum of the EU's National cultures – is energetic and thriving, drawing its strength from the multiplicity and diversity of national, regional and local culture in Europe.

Europe's language is its cultural diversity. The skill and expertise with which it handles this is an important metaphor for all other policy areas, from democratic legitimacy to environmental and economic sustainability. If Europe is first and foremost a cultural project, policies (in terms of their significance, priorities, competences, partnerships) have to reflect this potential. Also outside Europe.

Europe's culture rests on common ground of experiences that evolved out of the continent's history and the development of its values, summed up in the Conventions of the Council of Europe and the Preamble to the Lisbon Treaty. These European values, whatever their national and regional origins, are the essential basis on which the process of European integration rests.

Strengthening and promoting ideas and policies for cosmopolitan integration and cohesion rests on cultural solutions. The EU can be pioneering in this field, explaining how concepts like 'Participation' and 'cultural citizenship' can be key words in shaping policy. These are not just important in terms of economic development and urban cohesion; they offer significant opportunities to create new ways of avoiding and recovering from conflict around the world.

State of play: EU policy, Member States and External Relations

The European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World (adopted by the EU institutions in 2007) highlights External Relations as a prominent field for the implementation of the Agenda's main objective, namely to give culture a place at the heart of EU policies.

On top of this, the EU has identified Culture as one of the principal strands of its external relations policy: strengthening the rule of law, developing cultural diplomacy as an instrument of conflict prevention and management, protecting and enhancing cultural heritage, creating mechanisms for civil society co-operation, dialogue and exchange (people to people contacts).

The Council has endorsed the set up of a new **European External Action Service**. It is aimed at enabling **greater coherence and efficiency in the EU's external action** and increasing its **political and economic influence** in the

world. It will **assist** the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in fulfilling her mandate. What role for culture in the external relations?

At a national level, the agenda within the informal group of directors for cultures at Ministries of Foreign Affairs (the only formal group for discussion between Member States on this issue) developed after the Slovenian and French presidencies goes in the direction of strategies for promoting co-operation projects. This is an important step as it goes beyond just separate national cultural foreign policies. Nevertheless, in the light of the launch of the new High Representative of the European Union, isn't the time ripe to launch - within this new mandate - a real, integral cultural foreign policy of the European Union and establish adequate administrative conditions for this new mandate?

Possible discussion points and outcomes

The discussion is aimed at thinking about tools, responsibilities, and competences in shaping Europe's cultural foreign policies: How is Europe's cultural potential reflected and translated in the European foreign policies? What role for the European Parliament – for the different committees - for the Commission and its DGs, for national foreign ministries, for cities and regions in a new policy setting? What set up of the new **European External Action Service**? What role for national cultural institutes and civil society?

- We see an urgency that a profound understanding of the cultural component needs to be embedded in the remit and work of the High Representative and the External Action Service. The Service will require a specialist administration, able to develop and deliver this field of competence as an active and coherent pillar of a common European foreign policy
- Knowledge and an authentic understanding of foreign cultures should be seen as one of the main assets of an EU diplomatic service.
- Aim: It is not about setting up cultural co-operation projects, or a European cultural strategy; it is not just about sharing of best practices, but shaping a real EU foreign policy including a real cultural component based on above mentioned principles, tools and competences; improving EU's external relations, and through it, the role of culture worldwide
- Competence and partnerships: An organisational anchoring of culture in the new department of the High Representative and the external Action Service requires cooperation with networks such as EUNIC which should be part of fulfilling the objectives of European foreign policy. The EU member states have a wide range of different cultural capacities and historical relationships to contribute. France, Britain, The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Italy have strong community and institutional ties with their former colonies, for example. Newer member states, like the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Bulgaria, have important traditions of specialist training. Languages, marketing educational opportunities, information, science, sporting links, youth programme: each members state uses a different product mix and different organisations to deliver is. Small Member States and 'national regions' (e.g. Luxembourg, Ireland, Catalunya) can offer useful models of using culture as a dynamic force in development and regeneration. Thematic topics of cultural diplomacy are culture and development, intercultural dialogue, culture and conflict resolution.
- A formal discussion process: to be instituted at the level of Member State foreign ministers: a working group for culture in external relations to develop and widen national thinking about the EU's role.
- A process of reflection within European institutions within the DGs, and the European Parliament, Council of Europe
- Public debate about the cultural dimension of the EU External Action Service: to be facilitated, especially since it will incorporate development and security responsibilities as well as representation.

The event is co-organized with EUNIC and the initiative A Soul for Europe and its Brussels' office at the European House for Culture.

