

## **CULTURE AND THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND POLICIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The purpose of this review of the relevant literature was not to give a detailed investigation of the theory and practice governing the design<sup>1</sup> and function of external cultural relations between the EU and third countries. Instead it considered the following more focused questions relating to the EU:

- To what extent is the EU authorised (through its treaties) by the decision-making Member States to introduce a more enhanced cultural component into its emerging foreign and security policies?
- To what extent would/do the EU Member States actively or passively agree to such an integrated complementary policy?
- To what extent is a cultural component already included in the external relations policy of the EU?
- Is there, as far as content and geographical priorities are concerned, enough common ground between the Member States to further strengthen such a cultural component?

**T o w h a t e x t e n t i s t h e E U l e g a l l y  
a u t h o r i s e d t o e n t e r t h e c u l t u r a l  
f i e l d i n i t s r e l a t i o n s w i t h t h i r d  
c o u n t r i e s ?**

When the EU Member States signed the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 and the Treaty of Amsterdam (an updated and extended version of the former<sup>2</sup>) in 1997, for the first time in the history of the European Community<sup>3</sup> the EU Commission was endowed with legally binding cultural competences on the basis of two restricting principles: respect for cultural diversity at home and abroad and respect for subsidiarity. The latter implies that Community cultural actions within and beyond the EU must not substitute respective actions developed by one or more Member States, but should preferably support, complement and/or coordinate them.

Community action should:

1. "Contribute to the flowering of cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the cultural heritage to the fore";
2. Encourage cooperation between Member States, and, if necessary, support and complement their action in the following areas:
  - Improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples;
  - Conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance;
  - Non-commercial cultural exchanges;
  - Artistic and literary creation, including the audiovisual sector.
3. "Foster cultural cooperation between Member States and with third countries and competent international organisations, in particular the Council of Europe"

In addition, paragraph 4 of the decisive article 151 (Amsterdam) stipulates that:

4. "The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its actions under other provisions of the Treaty, in particular to respect and promote the diversity of cultures."

And "in order to achieve these objectives the Council shall adopt incentive measures.... and act unanimously on a proposal from the Commission".

In short: among other things, Article 151 provides a certain legal basis for an enhanced cultural component in the emerging foreign and security policy of the EU; however, the principles and preconditions for cultural activities on the part of the EU laid down in article 151.4 of the Treaty of Maastricht/Amsterdam are open to interpretation.

**T o w h a t e x t e n t h a s t h e E U m a d e  
u s e o f i t s ( r e s t r i c t e d ) c u l t u r a l  
c o m p e t e n c e s i n i t s e x t e r n a l  
r e l a t i o n s w i t h t h i r d c o u n t r i e s  
t h u s f a r ?**

While cultural cooperation with third countries is an integral part of overall foreign strategy as formalised by most Member States in official political strategy papers and contracts with their chosen intermediaries (excluding bilateral treaties), there is no such integrated strategy at EU level towards the world as a whole, neither complementary to, supportive of, nor coordinating the efforts of the EU Member States. There is not yet “one telephone number”, one person responsible for external EU relations; nor is there yet a coherent cultural policy with regard to third countries. However, the external policy of the EU does include cultural components to varying degrees. These tend to be organised according to geographical units/regions,<sup>4</sup> and governed by a variety of Directorates General.

The policies, objectives and resources of the responsible Directorates General of the European Commission, for External Relations,<sup>5</sup> for Development,<sup>6</sup> and for Enlargement<sup>7</sup> are not always convergent, despite united efforts for better coordination, including in the cultural field.<sup>8</sup> The Directorate General responsible for Culture, Education, Youth and Sports<sup>9</sup> focuses on the cultural cooperation policy and programmes of the EU. It scarcely supports significant programmes beyond the EU (although some neighbourhood countries are included in programme support). Ongoing criticism addresses the mismatch between §151.4 (Treaty of Amsterdam) and the competences of the DG for Culture, with the exception that a special advisory position has recently been created to follow the UNESCO Convention negotiations.

In most EU Member States, the respective ministries of cultural and external relations attempt to join forces (this is particularly evident when signing bilateral or multilateral agreements with a cultural component<sup>10</sup>). In contrast, the EU Directorates General still lack a common strategy and coordination between the units. Having said this, after the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992, EU delegations in third countries were provided with a budget for “information and culture” (10% of the varying amounts allowed for culture). What is of even more importance, an explicit cultural component has increasingly been included in various regional and bilateral agreements between the EU and third countries.

This is clearly the case with “The European Neighbourhood policy”,<sup>11</sup> run by the DG for External Relations, designed “to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and to offer neighbouring countries the chance to participate in various EU activities through greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation.”

However, while an explicit cultural component was introduced in cooperations with the countries of the Southern and Eastern shore of the Mediterranean, through the policy actions of the “Euro-Mediterranean partnership” (which even led to the establishment of the culturally orientated Anna Lindh Foundation in Alexandria in 2005),<sup>12</sup> an explicit cultural component is not included in the agreements with, or policies towards, the South Eastern and Eastern EU neighbours. These are, administratively speaking, split between the DG for External Relations and the DG for Enlargement. The latter cares for the acceding countries, Bulgaria and Romania,

the candidate countries, Turkey and Croatia, and the potential candidate countries, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro and Kosovo. They have all profited, and still profit, from infrastructural development programmes such as PHARE or CARDS.<sup>13</sup> These programmes have only a limited cultural potential and serve only occasionally cultural aims, e.g. supporting the establishment or reinforcement of cultural infrastructures.

Beyond the neighbourhood/enlargement policy, a clear priority of the EU, the Commission introduced an explicit cultural component into the APC policies towards the countries of Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean, administered by DG Development. An “integral concept” has been formulated in the agreement of Contonou in 2000, which takes the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects into account.

Since the Bangkok Summit in 1996, the cultural dimension of EU relations with Asia are developed through the ASEM meetings.<sup>14</sup> Although the exchanges generally are of a highly political and economic nature, they have resulted in the Asia Europe Foundation,<sup>15</sup> which does its best to promote cultural and educational exchange.

The cultural dimension within EU relations extended to Latin America has clearly increased since the “Rio Summit” in 1999. Of six EU programmes, two relate to culture: the so-called ALFA programme,<sup>16</sup> concentrating above all on cultural heritage and cooperation in higher education, and ALBAN,<sup>17</sup> covering studies for postgraduates as well as higher training for Latin America professionals/future decision-makers. Other examples could also be given,<sup>18</sup> such as support from the DG for External Relations for cooperation between Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East, but this cooperation focuses above all on a political dialogue and has little cultural impact.

However, it remains to be seen to what extent an agreed cultural component is enforced in further EU documents and actions.

If one interprets the Maastricht/Amsterdam Treaty provision for “taking culture into account in all EU activities” as Therese Kaufman has done<sup>19</sup> (“the crossing of borders in a geographical and political sense as well as the boundaries of distinct fields or disciplines”, stressing the interrelation of “culture with a variety of other fields and almost every aspect of contemporary life and society”, also recognising “that the cultural sector generates employment and contributes to social cohesion, innovation, sustainable development and other common objectives of the EU”), then this goal has not been fully implemented, neither by the EU nor by the equally obliged Member States. The struggle over the EU budget for the coming years and tough World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations reflect the various national interests vis-à-vis the EU.

In short: Since the Treaty of Maastricht/Amsterdam, an explicit and an implicit cultural component has “crept” into more EU agreements with third countries. Yet, at the level of EU policymaking, the issue of cultural cooperation with third countries has had no priority so far.<sup>20</sup> The limited coordination between the DGs responsible respectively for external relations, enlargement and culture perhaps compounds the problem.

**A r e t h e r e s h a r e d o b j e c t i v e s o f  
t h e E U M e m b e r S t a t e s a n d t h e E U  
w i t h r e g a r d t o a n e n h a n c e d  
c u l t u r a l c o m p o n e n t i n t h e i r  
e x t e r n a l r e l a t i o n s ?**

As far as content is concerned, promotion of their cultures – mostly via the arts and through language policy – is the first priority of the Member States, while the EU tends (if at all) to

promote the cultural infrastructures, policies and the vitality of cultures of third countries as part of its development aid and its stabilisation and democratisation programmes.

Yet both the EU and the Member States point to the importance of intercultural dialogue, mobility and exchange and claim to support the promotion of cultural diversity at home and abroad in order to foster mutual respect and understanding in an increasingly complex and unstable world. Shared objectives became prominently evident in October 2005 when all the EU Member States unanimously agreed on the much-debated UNESCO "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions". This Convention was negotiated jointly by the EU Commission on behalf of the Community and the Council President on behalf of the Member States.

Both the Member States and the European Commission have realised, not only because of September 11 but also because European societies have become more and more multicultural, that the political dimensions of development aid might have important repercussions, such as the possible prevention of conflicts, the strengthening of democratic systems and civil societies, and the spread of universal European values. Therefore, as these issues have increasingly become an important factor in foreign policies and are strongly embedded in culture and cultures, there is a vast and increasingly shared conviction that intercultural dialogue, intercultural competences, cultural "management of diversity" are indispensable for future foreign and security policies. "Clash of cultures" ideologies are no longer considered appropriate in this context.

Based on this mutual understanding, the Commission declared 2008 as the "European Year of Intercultural Dialogue" (to be backed by some EU funds) and is now seeking the approval of the European Parliament and the Council. This will not only focus on intercultural activities within the EU, but will enable "Europe to make its voice heard in the world and to forge effective partnerships with neighbouring countries, thus extending the zone of stability and democracy beyond the Union and thereby influencing the well-being and security of European citizens and all those living in the European Union".<sup>21</sup>

Geographically speaking, there is much common ground as regards the strategic interest of the Member States and the Commission. It may turn out in reality to be even larger than appears in the study. Nevertheless, it is possible even now to pinpoint some clear connections in geographical priorities.

The "Southern" EU neighbourhood policy covering, from West to East, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, is supported by EU Member States generally, not only by the direct EU neighbours.<sup>22</sup>

Although it is not yet structurally as solid as in the MED policies, the same applies in principle to the EU Neighbourhood Policy stretching from the South East and East of the European Union, covering Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus. An enhanced and explicit cultural component in the agreements with these countries as well as with the Western Balkans would be highly welcomed, certainly (but not only) by those neighbouring EU Member States who already maintain strong cultural ties with them.

Some of the 77 countries included in the EU APC development programmes are of special interest to former colonial powers, including both larger (e.g. UK and France) and smaller countries (e.g. the Netherlands and Portugal).

An increasingly strong interest in Asia is shared by the EU and the Member States, for various historical or contemporary reasons. All the larger EU Member States have cultural ties with certain Asiatic countries, while the smaller ones aspire to have them.

Latin America is less of a shared focus for Member States, though it is definitely of utmost interest to Spain and to some extent Portugal. Nonetheless, the model of European integration and multilateralism is studied in many countries and intergovernmental conferences in Latin America to a remarkable degree. There is seemingly a demand to include culture in joint projects.

The EU does not maintain explicit cultural relations with the United States beyond educational programmes. However, it goes without saying that “cultural” paradigms dominate the transatlantic discourses to a wide extent. Global discussions concerning cultural diversity and the role and responsibility of the public authorities supporting it (market versus cultural values) are often marked by obvious differences between the US and the EU. The most recent example, the UNESCO Convention, which was not adopted by the US, again underlines the importance of developing a cultural EU strategy in cooperation and comparison with the US.

Regarding Russia, in addition to the “Northern Dimension” supported by the EU,<sup>23</sup> technical support programmes (TACIS)<sup>24</sup> have been developed which allow for only some implicit cultural elements. The marked absence of an EU cultural strategy vis-à-vis Russia obviously does not match the fact that most of the new and old Member States have a special interest in Russia, based on many historical and current reasons, and that many Member States, large and small, try to balance their foreign cultural relations between the (former) two superpowers. There is clearly more common ground than is currently taken into account by the EU.

In short: As far as the strategies and geographical priorities of the EU and the Member States are concerned, there are obvious communalities which call for a greater recognition of the cultural factor in EU foreign policies.

The European Union’s stance and unanimity with respect to the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity is unique. Of course, it needs to be implemented, and the next steps within the WTO/GATS treaty negotiations will again stimulate the debate.

Cultural and intercultural relations are increasingly recognised as a decisive element of foreign and security policies at all levels, including that of the EU.

Whether this insight will be transformed into EU cultural policies and programmes as an integral part of the Union’s emerging foreign and security policy, complementary to Member States’ policies, and whether such a strategy will be equipped with the necessary funds, remains to be seen.

#### Notes

- 1 For more details see: “Europa fördert Kultur”, <http://europa-foerdert-kultur.info/politik11/txt20050712284335.php?nov1=pol...>
- 2 [http://europa.eu.int/eurolex/lex/en/treaties/dat/12002E/htm/C\\_2002325EN,003301/html](http://europa.eu.int/eurolex/lex/en/treaties/dat/12002E/htm/C_2002325EN,003301/html)
- 3 though there were earlier but not legally binding declarations to that end; for a summary see: Olaf Schwencke, *Das Europa der Kulturen- Kulturpolitik in Europa*, published in German by the Kulturpolitische Gesellschaft, Klartext Verlag, Essen, 2001. In addition some cultural components had already been introduced in external EU relations, for example, in 1986, in the third Lomé agreement on co operation with countries of Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean, the so-called APC policies.
- 4 These regions are: Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific; Asia & Australasia; the Balkans; Eastern Europe & Central Asia; Latin America; the Mediterranean Region; the Middle East; and North America.
- 5 [http:// europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations)
- 6 <http://europa.eu.int/comm/development>
- 7 <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement>
- 8 For example, on 1 January 2001, “Europeaid” was created to improve cooperation between the DG for External Relations and the DG for Development (<http://eu.int/comm/europeaid>). A European Cultural Portal has also been set up to demonstrate cultural projects supported by EU programmes as part of international EU relations: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/portal/action/relations/relation\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/portal/action/relations/relation_en.htm)

- 9 [http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/portal/funding/eac\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/portal/funding/eac_en.htm)
- 10 See: country profiles
- 11 <http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/partners.htm>: covering the Southern EU neighbourhood policy from West to East: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Palestinian Authority, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. And from South East to East of the EU: Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.
- 12 [www.euromedalex.org](http://www.euromedalex.org)
- 13 PHARE established in 1989 “Poland and Hungary: Action for the Reconstruction of the Economy”. CARDS was created in 1996, “Community Assistance, Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation” focussing on the Western Balkans. This pre-accession programme was recently renewed and enlarged. For the period covered by the next financial perspectives (2007-2013) pre accession assistances will be streamlined under the future “Instrument for Pre Accession Assistance”, which will replace PHARE, as well as CARDS and the Turkish pre accession instrument”, according to the website of DG Enlargement.
- 14 Comprising of political representatives of the EU Member States and 10 Asian countries :Brunei, China, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. <http://europa.eu.int/comm>
- 15 <http://www.asef.org>
- 16 [http://europa.eu.int/commeuropeaid/projects/alfa/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/commeuropeaid/projects/alfa/index_en.htm)
- 17 [http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/alban/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/alban/index_en.htm)
- 18 See comments in Europas fördert Kultur : <http://www.europa-foerdert-kultur.info/politik11/txt20050712284335.php?8nov1=pol...>
- 19 Kaufmann, Therese EIPCP : <http://www.eipc.net>
- 20 The same conclusions are drawn by the «Etude de la coopération extérieure de l`Union européenne et de ses membres dans les secteurs de la culture et de l`audiovisuel» commissioned by the European Commission, DG Culture and Education; part 4, by Ernst & Young; final report June 2004; [http://europa.eu.int/comm/avpolicy/stat/2002/5770\\_barbier/58-02\\_tome4.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/avpolicy/stat/2002/5770_barbier/58-02_tome4.pdf) and Europa-Foerdert-Kultur. In addition, both sources underline that EU delegations in third countries are not primarily busy with cultural questions.
- 21 [http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/portal/events/pdf/proposal\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/culture/portal/events/pdf/proposal_en.pdf)
- 22 All the then 15 EU members signed the Barcelona Declaration in 1995, thus starting a special relationship with the EU:  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/euromed/bd.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/euromed/bd.htm)
- 23 “The Northern Dimension,” is a coordinating and supporting mechanism covering all Northern EU Member States as well as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Iceland, Norway and the Russian Federation.  
[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/north\\_dim/doc/rep2004\\_annual\\_action\\_pla\\_n\\_report.pdf](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/north_dim/doc/rep2004_annual_action_pla_n_report.pdf)
- 24 TACIS was established in 1991 to give “Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States”.

