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The challenges of an EU strategy for international  
cultural relations in a multipolar world

Tamás Szűcs



European University Institute  
**Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies**  
Global Governance Programme

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## **Abstract**

By channelling the results of recent scholarship into policymaking and feeding new policy developments into the academic discourse, this paper aims at contributing to a joint reflection on the development of EU international cultural relations in the context of global public diplomacy embedded in a wider process of eroding state sovereignties, the rise of non-governmental actors, and the acceleration of information technology. Investigating how the EU could be positioned among world powers in the intensifying race for soft power in the twenty-first century, the paper argues that Member States can only influence these global movements by acting together. It concludes that the new institutional dynamics of the Lisbon Treaty may take the nascent EU strategy further than its predecessors and, notwithstanding the immense challenges, can also be interpreted as a timely reminder to uphold the fundamental values of European integration even under difficult circumstances. Overall, this seems to indicate that strengthening the symbolic and cultural dimension could be an important factor in the EU's foreign policy, and the new approach based on mutual outreach could facilitate mutual understanding as well as the fight against radicalization and populism

## **Keywords**

EU; international; culture; diplomacy; soft power



## Introduction\*

This paper aims at providing a constructive analysis of the Joint Communication ‘Towards an EU Strategy for international cultural relations’ adopted by the European Commission (EC) and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy in June 2016 (European Commission, 2016a) in the broader context of the EC’s and the European External Action Service’s (EEAS) efforts to revisit the EU’s Public Diplomacy in order to facilitate a more effective EU engagement in third countries. I point out that both within and outside Europe these efforts are embedded in the much broader phenomena of eroding state sovereignty, the rise of non-governmental actors, and the rapid expansion of information technology. By channelling the results of recent scholarship into policymaking as well as feeding new policy developments into the academic discourse, this paper will attempt to contribute to a joint reflection on how the new approach to cultural diplomacy could, among others, build bridges between peoples and facilitate mutual understanding. It will also investigate the degree to which this may become an efficient tool to counter radicalization and populism as well as how it could enrich international development.

I will explore the extent to which the nascent strategy can reinforce the EU’s actions on the global scene by strengthening international partnerships, building on its distinctive soft-power potential. Ideas and concrete examples are compiled to review in detail the new strategic framework’s implementation capacity with the new model for cooperation with Member States, national cultural institutes, private and public operators. How Europe could be positioned among the emerging new world powers at the beginning of the twenty-first century is also examined. By shedding light on the early phase of its implementation through the on-going work conducted in the framework of the Cultural Diplomacy Platform, the Council’s Work Plan for Culture, and the responsible EC/EEAS services with a special focus on the elevated role of EU Delegations, I intend to show that strengthening the symbolic and cultural dimension could be an important factor in foreign policy as well as in facilitating a sense of belonging to Europe.

I will argue that the Lisbon Treaty changed the institutional dynamics and that the unprecedented ‘twin track approach’ of cultural and foreign policy agents working closely together may take the nascent strategy further than many previous EU initiatives in the cultural field. The Joint Communication can also be interpreted as a timely reminder to uphold the fundamental values of European integration even under very difficult circumstances such as an upsurge of authoritarian nationalism, Brexit, the economic and migration crises, some Member States’ reluctance to embrace the paradigm shift to engage in collaborative projects, and, especially in post-colonial states, a sense of resentment of ‘Western/European cultural superiority’.

The paper begins with a critical review of the genealogy of EU international cultural relations, showing that the Joint Communication is the result of the cumulative efforts of cultural stakeholders and European institutions. This process has its roots in the early attempts to Europeanise the national public discourses and the quest for a European identity and had thus already begun around the time of the Maastricht Treaty. Nonetheless, my focus will be on recent developments, primarily through the lens of key documents by EU institutions.

The next section will situate the EU’s efforts to pursue international cultural relations in the context of public diplomacy on a global scale, coupled with an analysis of the terminology and use of soft power. It will highlight the fact that in recent decades, riding the waves of a ‘global cultural revolution’, a growing number of emerging economies have been catching up with the ‘traditional masters of soft power’—the US and the EU—and while the ‘top league’ is still dominated by the

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\* This paper reflects the personal views of the author. The European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use of the information contained herein.

West, major BRICS (especially Chinese) actors are actively trying to change this to gain greater global influence. However, if EU Member States act together, they should be able to withstand these pressures.

The third section will explore how the the EU responds to the new challenges by advocating a new model for cooperation with Member States, national cultural institutes, and private and public operators in order to create synergies during the Joint Communication's implementation. First, I will focus on the Joint Communication's innovative points to show that early engagement of key actors, in terms of both institutional follow-up and stakeholder activity, was ensured; this is expressed in the latest Council Conclusions agreeing to draw up an integrated strategic approach for international cultural relations. Second, I will examine the internal arrangements of the responsible EC and EEAS services to ensure coherence and a long-term perspective, including plans for a proper financing mechanism. Third, I will evaluate the significance of pilot projects in the new strategic approach, pointing out that instead of replacing what Member States have been doing well for many years on their own, these are actions where a joint approach yields more benefits than those delivered by the sum of bilateral initiatives.

The final section will consider the perspectives and relevance of the nascent strategy in the rapidly-evolving international and intra-EU context through a critical examination of the approach taken in the last few years, outlining both its advantages and weaknesses. It will reflect on how the main players across the globe use their soft power and the role of cultural diplomacy today, taking into account the rapidly evolving North-South power relationship and how it relates to EU development policy.

Given this topic's interdisciplinary nature and the relatively scarce academic literature, I rely on a social constructivist approach combined with my personal observations 'on the ground'. Secondary qualitative data will be examined in the context of actual policymaking, also drawing extensively on my experience in the Commission and Council. Primary data collected through face-to-face interviews with senior EU and Member State officials managing this dossier will be complemented with a critical, close reading of selected EU policy documents and recent scholarship. Finally, I will also integrate the results of presentations and discussions of an EL-CSID workshop in April and a high-level policy workshop at the EUI in May 2017 with the participation of key policy actors and renowned scholars in the field of EU international cultural relations.

## **1. Genealogy of the nascent EU strategy for international cultural relations**

The Joint Communication is the result of a long-standing cumulative effort of cultural stakeholders and European institutions. The Maastricht Treaty contained the first legal provisions on culture, but the roots go back to early attempts to Europeanize the national public discourses and the search for a common narrative as first set out officially in the 1973 Declaration on European Identity and followed by the 1975 Tindemans Report. Even earlier, public diplomacy activities had an important role in reconciling public opinion in the founding countries of the European Communities in the aftermath of World War II. In this context, prominent efforts have been made to use culture to create a European identity, a special sense of belonging, most notably in the Adonnino report (Commission of the European Communities, 1985) submitted to the Milan European Council of June 1985, which decided on the culturally-based political symbols of the EU flag and anthem. The report also contained several ideas that found their way into the cultural policy discourse and re-emerged in subsequent years as concrete proposals relating to cultural heritage, such as town twinning. Y Raj Isar (2015) offers an insightful account of this process, referring also to the seminal research of Chris Shore (2000) and Monica Sassatelli (2009), among others.

More recently, in 2005, in the wake of the negative referendums on the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands, there has been renewed discussion among policymakers, stakeholders, and civil-society organizations alike on how to move Europe forward. Throughout this process,

influential NGOs and advocacy platforms, especially the European Cultural Foundation and Culture Action Europe, have played a very important role through their constructive collaboration with EU institutions, particularly the European Parliament and the European Commission (Isar, 2015). As a result, the drive to include cultural policy as a core element of EU foreign policy received a major boost which, in May 2007, led to the adoption of the ‘European Agenda for Culture in a globalizing world’ (European Commission, 2007). This was endorsed the following November, with a Council Resolution of the Ministers of Culture (Council of the European Union, 2007) welcoming the perspective to develop further cooperation in the cultural field, increase the coherence and visibility of European action, and strengthen the transversal role of culture. The Council also agreed with the strategic and specific objectives proposed by the Commission at the time, among which enhancing the role of culture in the EU’s external relations and development policy already held a prominent place. In June 2008, in the context of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the European Council also ‘recognised the value of cultural cooperation and intercultural dialogue as an integral part of all relevant external policies’ in a rather cautiously worded paragraph in its Conclusions (Council of the European Union, 2008a).

The contrast between the culture ministers’ decisive, detailed text and the rather thin language of Heads of States or Governments seems to reflect not only the fact that culture remains primarily a clear national (and/or regional) competence, but also a different degree of interest and ownership in this field at the highest political level in most (though not all) EU countries. Such an impression is reinforced by a comparison with the Council Conclusions by Ministers of Culture issued half a year later (Council of the European Union, 2008b), which effectively calls for ‘drawing up a European strategy for incorporating culture consistently and systematically in the external relations of the Union’ as well as for ‘establishing specific strategies with regions and countries outside the Union’ that should be tailored to their economic and social situations through a consultation process with the entities concerned. In addition, it also expresses support for a long list of actions, many of which have since been taken up in the triennial Work Plans for Culture. In fact, to date, these two Council Conclusions remain the strongest official commitment by Member States to work together in the cultural domain, which, even with the cautious backing of the European Council, created fertile terrain to move on institutionally and for concrete actions across the globe.

Prompted by the establishment of the European External Action Service, the EC’s implementation report on the European Agenda for Culture in 2010 (European Commission, 2010), as well as intensive stakeholder activity, the next major institutional step was the European Parliament’s adoption in May 2011 of an ambitious Resolution on the cultural dimensions of the EU’s external action (European Parliament, 2011). Always one of the most ardent supporters of cultural initiatives (Duke, 2013), the European Parliament proposed streamlining external EU cultural policy and projects to use cultural resources more efficiently and develop ‘a visible common EU strategy on the cultural aspects of the EU’s external relations’. It even devoted a separate section to ‘Cultural diplomacy and cultural cooperation’, stressing ‘the need for the EU to act as a world player with a global perspective and global responsibility’ (*Ibid.*, p. 22) and called for specifically-designated and trained EEAS staff to be in charge of cultural affairs at the new EU Delegations. To facilitate the achievement of these aims, the European Parliament decided to launch a Preparatory Action on ‘Culture in EU external relations’ that was carried out in 2013-2014 by a consortium of cultural institutes and organisations commissioned by the European Commission.

The end result of this thorough exercise was a comprehensive final report covering 54 countries— all EU members, the EU’s ten strategic partner countries, and the 16 countries of the EU’s neighbourhood policy. Of course, it is impossible to reflect the wealth of research and full range of ideas of the 135-page report (European Union, 2014a, b) within the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting the key messages highlighted by its authors acknowledging that, in the new realities of today’s globalized world, cultural relations must be pursued on the basis of mutual outreach. That is: cultural relations’ huge potential for enhancing European influence, or ‘soft power,’ externally can only be

fulfilled if Europe itself becomes ready to learn from other cultures; a great demand exists for more and better cultural relations between Europe and the rest of the world that can also deliver greater prosperity and human development for all; to profit from this demand, the EU needs to develop a cultural relations strategy that engages all partners based on dialogue, rather than just projecting individual national cultures of its members; there needs to be a stronger response to the cultural interests and practices of youth; EU institutions, national cultural relations agencies, and cultural civil-society should build a ‘joined up’ strategy based on the values of reciprocity, mutuality, and shared responsibility in a spirit of ‘global cultural citizenship’; a cultural relations policy requires strong political will, commitment, and adequate funding from the EU budget; such a strategy should be implemented mainly by cultural professionals, starting with a series of prototypes and pilot projects to inform and kick-start it, ideally also triggering a process of transformative change in the way Europe’s international cultural relations are conceived and carried out (European Union, 2014b, p. 9).

The report, titled *Engaging the World: Towards Global Cultural Citizenship*, earned almost immediate and unanimous acclaim by non-state cultural actors upon publication in mid-2014. EU institutions quickly followed suit, embracing both its spirit and several of its recommendations, thus generating new actions and concrete pilot projects. Given its nature, the report itself could not—for obvious political and legal reasons—receive a full, official endorsement as such by any of them, but in practice it has become a standard reference point for all. Perhaps most importantly, it was taken up in the Council’s Work Plan for Culture 2015–2018, adopted by the Ministers of Culture at their session on 26 November 2014 (Council of the European Union, 2014), with the objective of analysing its content and ensuring proper follow-up over the next three years. In line with this—and reflecting also on a European Parliament proposal—the Commission launched a first pilot project already in 2015 (European Commission, 2015a). A range of other initiatives followed, most of them finding their way into the new strategy. The last formal step before the Joint Communication’s preparation came from the Ministers of Culture at their Council meeting on 24 November 2015, when the Commission, jointly with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy was called on to ‘develop and present a more strategic approach to culture in external relations’ (Council of the European Union, 2015). At that meeting, the Council stressed that such an approach should also address the challenges posed by the migratory crisis, radicalisation, xenophobia, and illicit trafficking of cultural heritage in conflict zones.

Alongside EU institutions, an essential role throughout the preparatory process has been played by civil-society actors, NGOs, policy experts, lobbyists, and scholars in the cultural domain. The European Cultural Foundation, participants in the ‘More Europe–External Cultural Relations’ initiative (More Europe, 2017), national cultural institutes and their European network EUNIC, which was established in 2006, have all featured prominently as a source of fresh ideas and active first-movers in various experiments. On a parallel track, a number of development experts and stakeholders in Brussels, as well as in some Member States and third countries, have been working consistently on how the potential of culture could be exploited for international development (Helly, 2017). The fact that all these diverse agents are working for the same objective seems to confirm that the strategy’s formulation process had a distinctive polyvocal, bottom-up character (Isar, 2015; see also Sassatelli, 2009) which had a positive implication on its reception and may well have the same effect over the course of its implementation. The role of the two largest international organisations with a distinctive cultural profile, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, also deserves to be mentioned. Both have been cooperating with the EU for decades and their major initiatives — among others, the 2015 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the Council of Europe’s 2008 White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, and the 2005 Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention) — have provided useful inspiration and complementarity for the EU’s efforts, and their basic principles are reflected in the Joint Communication.

## **2. Public diplomacy and soft power on a global scale**

Public diplomacy in general, and European public diplomacy in particular, lends itself as a relevant explanatory, conceptual framework to better understand the new strategy's significance. It is also explicitly stated in a comprehensive study requested by the EC's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) entitled 'Analysis of the perception of the EU and the EU's policies abroad', which was specifically designed 'to contribute to the EU Public Diplomacy outreach activities' to fine-tune messages and themes to local conditions, 'facilitating a more meaningful and effective EU engagement globally' (European Commission, 2015b). This study formed an integral part of the EC's effort to 'revisit the EU's Public Diplomacy' together with the EU Global Strategy, the Preparatory Action, and the Joint Communication itself. Its scope covered a wide range of relevant themes related to the concept and use of soft power, with culture being one of the most prominent.

The EU's public diplomacy efforts have received relatively scant attention to date in academic research (see Davis Cross & Melissen, 2013) despite a recent surge of interest in public diplomacy in general. Public diplomacy itself does not have a single, standard definition, but broadly speaking is 'an instrument used by states, associations of states, some sub-state and non-state actors' as well as by international organisations 'to understand cultures, attitudes, and behaviour, build and manage relationships; and influence thoughts and mobilize actions to advance their interests and values' (Melissen, 2013). These objectives may be achieved by various means including science, education, or even sports and lifestyles, but for the purposes of this paper I will mainly cover culture.

While public diplomacy has a history with roots in ancient times, here I will focus on the period starting with the creation of the European Communities, with a special emphasis on current and future perspectives. The founding fathers of a united Europe and American post-World War II politicians were not the only ones trying to facilitate this process. A number of prominent artists and intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic also considered cultural diplomacy a key vehicle for persuading public opinion to shed hostilities and for bringing historical enemies closer to each other (Hewitson & D'Auria, 2012). Heinrich Mann, Richard N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, George Orwell, Paul Valéry, T.S. Eliot, Denis de Rougemont, Luigi Einaudi were among those involved through their work and activities, while American jazz music and Hollywood films also played their part in this conscious effort. One of three working committees at the Congress of Europe at The Hague in 1948 was the Cultural Committee, which proposed several measures in the cultural field that led to the establishment of the European Centre for Culture, the College of Europe, the Assembly of the Council of Europe, and the European Convention on Human Rights. Among the Marshall Plan's three conditions, the first two set out that any aid must be provided in a systematic way and obliged European countries to work out their plans together, while the third was that public opinion had to endorse the policy.

After these early efforts and the establishment of new European political structures, cultural diplomacy remained nationally focused for a long period. Despite their respective countries' membership in the same European Communities, and later in the European Union, the national cultural institutes that were its main vehicles almost solely represented their countries' national interests, traditions, and values both within the territory of the EC/EU and in third countries. Today this still remains their main mission, even though a slow process of change, going well beyond the institutes, can be observed since the late 1980s or early 1990s. Within Europe, this was partly due to a gradually increasing number of cultural, civic, and student exchange programs, most notably ERASMUS which was founded in 1987; the 1992 launch of the ARTE television channel with its European focus also proved to be an important milestone.

But both within and outside Europe this was embedded in the much broader phenomenon of eroding state sovereignties and rise of non-governmental actors, accelerating with what Baldwin (2016) calls 'the new globalization' driven by information technology that dramatically reduced the cost of moving ideas across borders. While Baldwin's theory deals with the logic of globalisation by

focusing on its economic and societal features, globalisation also has obvious—albeit, unexplored in the book—implications on the broader cultural realm. The smoother and instant flow of ideas, values, cultural initiatives, and products as well as the new art forms it has spurred in both popular and high culture, clearly escape the control of national governments even though dictatorial regimes still try hard to suppress them. Remarkably, almost in parallel to the declining control possibilities, a growing interest can be seen in public diplomacy, especially in its cultural dimension on several fronts (Ang *et al.*, 2015). While a growing number of national governments have intensified their individual efforts across the globe, most prominently the BRICS countries (Holden, 2013), major international organisations, especially NATO and the EU, have also become more active in their own right at the supranational level. At the same time global flows have resulted in a mushrooming of non-state agents promoting their own specific interests and burgeoning people-to-people contacts accelerated via the digital revolution.

At stake, of course, is *soft power*, a term coined by Joseph Nye (1990), the third—and perhaps central—element of the terminological triangle with *public diplomacy* and *cultural diplomacy*, with each term's blurred contours allowing it to take on a range of meanings beyond its original conception. It is important to note, however, that the term 'soft power' does not appear in the text of the Joint Communication. This is to signal through the language that the new strategy aims to go beyond simply projecting European cultures and, indeed, intends to generate a new spirit of dialogue, joint capacity-building, and global solidarity (European Union, 2014a; European Commission, 2012). A similar logic lies behind the preference for using the term 'EU international cultural relations'<sup>1</sup> as opposed to cultural diplomacy in the Joint Communication, but especially in the official documents of the Council, also to allay any potential claims of 'undue competence creep'. When these terms are disentangled (Ang *et al.*, 2015, pp. 366-368), it is worth noting that Nye originally advocated the use of 'soft power' not based solely on culture but also on democratic values and human rights and thus to complement rather than replace hard military and economic power in the specific context of American foreign policy. As the concept of soft power gained prominence and cultural diplomacy was increasingly deployed to serve public diplomacy goals, a simplified understanding of this triangle has become widespread in political discourse as well as in the media and in certain parts of academic literature. Essentially the three notions are closely intertwined. Soft power's core components are persuasion and attraction; it is based on corresponding resources and can be wielded for good or ill, both by public and cultural diplomacy not just in inter-state relations and via supranational actors, but also targeting the general public by governments or civilian agents alike (see Nye, 2006, for his clarifications). Simply put, it enables a state (or other actor) 'to attract others to want what it wants'. Nye himself refined his approach in 2003, introducing the term 'smart power' and in subsequent publications (2011a, b) elaborated that effective action requires states to deploy smart power which stems from a carefully constructed balance combining soft and hard power, citing Norway and China as good examples.

The US has traditionally been considered the 'master of soft power' in terms of its mass cultural outreach, while Europe (primarily via some of its members rather than as the EU) as a champion for its attractive social model, sophisticated art and literary scene, and high-end creative industry. But riding the waves of a 'global cultural revolution' (Renard & Biscop, 2012), in recent decades some of the emerging economies have been approaching very fast—especially in Asia, and most notably China. In fact, only China has an evident potential in the short- and medium term to challenge the US and the EU for global power in the economic and other spheres, with India following but at some distance. In 2004, China opened its first Confucius Institute and, as of March 2017, has a network of almost 500, complemented by more than a 1,000 Confucius classrooms targeting high schools and primary schools across the globe, including 169 in Europe, with new classrooms being established

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<sup>1</sup> This term was only adopted very recently; the Preparatory Action and its immediate follow up employed the expression 'culture in EU external relations' which was also used by Ishar (2015a) when examining the various narratives in this field and observing its broader connotations.

almost weekly across the world.<sup>2</sup> A remarkable, though lesser-known feature of these establishments, is that by teaming up with local universities and schools, they are more dispersed and more deeply embedded than Western institutes focusing on the biggest cities (Holden, 2013, p. 26). With the EU a ‘third pillar’ of the China-EU comprehensive strategic partnership, a High Level People to People Dialogue (HPPD) was established which had its third round in September 2015; in the framework of the joint mapping of the EU-China cultural and creative landscape. It was shown that the EU-China cultural cooperation is slowly moving from a traditional top-down showcasing approach to real people-to-people exchanges in a creative shared space in line with the original spirit of the HPPD and the new paradigm of cultural diplomacy. Nevertheless, doubts lingered whether the difference in objectives—China perceived that the EU wanted to promote European values and cultural diversity, while China aimed to deepen Europeans’ understanding of Chinese culture and history—could be overcome soon (Dewen, 2017).

Russia has also been particularly active in this field since 2007, when the Russkiy Mir Foundation was established, and is very keen to forge closer cultural relations with the EU during the implementation of the Joint Communication. Despite Russia’s recent attempts to intervene in election processes in the US and several EU countries (Germany, France, Bulgaria, etc.) and the particular nature of its public diplomacy which is often considered part of Russia’s ‘hybrid warfare’ artillery (Political Capital, 2017),<sup>3</sup> the EU has remained open to engaging in joint cultural projects.

Of all these countries, China obviously has the biggest impact, but is certainly not alone. With power in general becoming ever more diffuse and shifting globally towards the East and South, new research that ranks soft power (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2016)—and which, according to Nye, offers ‘the clearest picture of global soft power to date’—reveals that soft power is rising faster in North America and Asia than in Europe. While the index’s ‘top 30’ is still dominated by the West (15 EU members rank in this tier), Russia, South Korea, Singapore, New Zealand, Argentina, and Brazil also make the grade along with China, although Africa is still missing. This observation is in line with several other recent analyses (Holden, 2013; House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power, 2014) pointing to the fact that in contrast to major BRICS investments with a long-term goal of gaining cultural influence, Western governments (with the exception of Germany) are cutting back on culture-related funding, driven by a short-termist mindset under the pressure of economic crisis. In part to compensate for this trend, ‘European countries have been shifting their strategic focus by reducing their activities in other European countries and strengthening their presence in the Middle East and Asia’ (Holden, 2013, p. 27).

### **3. How to respond to the new challenges ?**

The new realities of our globalised world have also been recognised by the Joint Communication, and it is clear that in the medium to long run, Member States together could act more effectively in this field as well. Recent studies have shown a wide range of policy instruments at the EU’s disposal to maintain or even increase its influence. Despite cutbacks, EU Member States taken together have more than 900 cultural institutes within the EU and almost 1,300 outside the EU, employing approximately

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<sup>2</sup> See a full list on the Confucius HQ’s webpage: <http://english.hanban.org/>; in March 2017, 169 institutes were in Europe, 157 in America, and 46 in Africa, with new classrooms being established almost on a weekly basis all over the world.

<sup>3</sup> A recent extensive report by Political Capital (PC) describes how the Kremlin’s strategy supports fringe, extremist or paramilitary organisations in order to undermine bilateral ties with Ukraine and the United States, and destabilise the region after 2014. It also shows that Russia has been involved in similar activities all over the Western world, assisting actors ranging from the Italian Lega Nord to the Californian secessionist movement. Three CEE research institutes also launched a regular ‘disinformation monitor’ to draw public attention to how easily digestible pro-Kremlin content built on fake news, disinformation, conspiracy theories, anti-Western sentiment is being spread by the Russian propaganda. For the five case-studies and more details on the report as well as the monitor see : [http://www.politicalcapital.hu/index\\_gb.php](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/index_gb.php)

30,000 people worldwide and producing a global turnover of more than EUR 2.3 billion per year (European Parliament, 2016a, p. 11). These figures should be seen in the context of the newly envisaged role of the 139 EU Delegations run by the European External Action Service and the EU National Institutes for Culture, EUNIC, an umbrella network of member organisations from 28 countries with some 100 clusters around the world.. In addition, for example, the Erasmus Mundus scheme has provided grants to well over 6,000 students in Asia alone since 2004, while under the 7th Framework Programme, a comparable number of Asian researchers participated in Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (European Parliament, 2015, p. 5). If given a clear mandate to deal substantively with EU issues, pooling the expertise and resources of national cultural institutes would be able to work both in the interests of the EU and individual Member States. More joint activities would contribute to leveraging scale and increasing the visibility of the EU around the globe (European Parliament, 2016a, p. 12). This means that the EU, acting collectively, still has by far the largest cultural network and would have the necessary capabilities to engage effectively in third countries across the globe. Whether and how this impressive European toolbox of cultural, scientific, and educational diplomacy would be used is, of course, a matter of political vision and will.

Therefore the real question is whether the Joint Communication is well-suited to provide a new momentum that would ‘put culture at the heart of EU international relations’, as both HRVP Federica Mogherini (EEAS, 2016b) and Commissioner Tibor Navracsics (2016) have repeatedly stated, and how its implementation will unfold. The prerequisites seem to be there: the text reflects a comprehensive approach, including all existing and planned cooperation initiatives and financing mechanisms in a coherent way. Based on mutual respect and inter-cultural dialogue, it argues for a new model of enhanced cooperation with Member States, national cultural institutes, third countries, other international organisations, and private and public operators. Its emphasis on placing cultural diversity as an integral part of the values of the EU is also a defining element, and it aims at synergies during the implementation phase, which should be tailored to local sensitivities and regional characteristics.

In this spirit, it sets out three key objectives for creating a framework to advance international cultural cooperation with all partner-countries and other actors, highlighting the importance of the 2005 UNESCO Convention, in particular:

- supporting culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development;
- promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations; and,
- reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage.

By such an arrangement the new strategy can provide focus for the work ahead. The Joint Communication’s Section 3 (European Commission, 2016a, pp. 7-12) outlines the core activities, from new initiatives like planning a legislative proposal to combat illicit trafficking of cultural heritage to well-established projects like Med Culture (2014-2018) that have already proved their worth and are to be continued with promising additions like MedFilm, a new capacity-building programme to tackle sensitive issues in the Southern Neighbourhood.

In order to enable the EU and its Member States to cooperate effectively, the Joint Communication also offers a second ‘building block’: five guiding principles for shaping a more strategic and global approach. The first three principles are value-based and the others are more technical/pragmatic:

- to promote cultural diversity and respect for human rights;
- to foster mutual respect and inter-cultural dialogue;
- to ensure respect for complementarity and subsidiarity;
- to encourage a cross-cutting approach to culture; and,
- to promote culture through existing frameworks for cooperation.

These principles aim at ensuring that all EU actions remain coherent, promote basic European values, and respect subsidiarity. As most Member States already have extensive international cultural ties (of varying intensity and breadth as a result of their respective historical, cultural, financial, and social characteristics), and the EU has well-defined thematic and geographic cooperation frameworks with dedicated financing instruments, there was no need to ‘reinvent the wheel’. Rather, the real challenge was to bring all these elements under the same umbrella so that different activities could be implemented within the same overall vision.

Emphasising the need for partnerships, the Joint Communication also outlines the various institutional tools, civil society, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms as well as inter-cultural exchange possibilities. Such a concerted approach is expected to allow actors to avoid duplications, pool resources, and achieve economies of scale. Of course, the creation of a coherent, strategic approach is highly commendable, but only a first step. The real test is to live up to the multifaceted challenges of implementation in a complex environment. Early indications suggest this is off to a good start along two main tracks, even though it is likely to be a very long process.

### ***3.1. Fast take up in the inter-institutional framework and among stakeholders***

An important early engagement of key actors both in terms of institutional follow up and stakeholder activity was ensured. The text was presented in the relevant preparatory bodies of the Council of Ministers (CAC, CODEV, COAFR working groups + Coreper I) in September 2016 and it was well received (Interviews 1; 6; 7). This enabled the political level, the Culture Ministers, to welcome the EC/EEAS approach at their meeting in November (Council of the European Union, 2016b). Equally, or perhaps even more importantly, the Foreign Affairs Council in October had also highlighted ‘cultural diplomacy as an additional, valuable tool to achieve the goals set out in the EUGS’ in its conclusions on the EU Global Strategy for Foreign And Security Policy (Interview 2; Council of the European Union 2016a). At the same time it also ‘stressed the need of joining up efforts in the field of public diplomacy including strategic communication, inside and outside the EU, to speak with one voice and ultimately promote its core values’.

Most recently, Conclusions on the Joint Communication were adopted on 23 May 2017 at the Culture Council (Council of the European Union, 2017c). In this context, a Friends of Presidency Group was established to act as a cross-cutting platform to highlight the role of culture in other Council formations and to draw up an integrated strategic approach for international cultural relations. This Council Group was also tasked to develop a road map identifying issues where joint action at EU level could be undertaken. If its operation lives up to the expectations, the General Affairs Council may be able to adopt a set of Conclusions during the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018 in order to politically reaffirm the Member States’ commitment. Such a working method has a potential to facilitate the implementation. Applying a combined cultural/diplomatic approach that has been missing in the past is an encouraging step, but the deliverables will depend on the level of political attention and support from Member State capitals (Interviews 1; 3; 6; 7). The Council also requested the EC/EEAS to set up a single access web portal in the field of international cultural relations that has been a long-standing demand from cultural actors.

The European Parliament opted for a similar two-pronged approach by working on a joint report of the Culture and Education Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee, with its expected final adoption in July 2017. The draft European Parliament report (2016b) also welcomes the Joint Communication, but is even more ambitious than the Council as it calls for the development of an effective EU strategy on international cultural relations, annual and multiannual action plans, and a dedicated budget line in the next Multiannual Financial Framework to support actions in this field. The very fact that these meetings in the Council and the European Parliament were organized as joint sessions is in itself already a welcome break from the past, reinforcing the hope that culture could

indeed be ‘placed at the heart of the EU’s foreign policy’, echoing the speech of HRVP Mogherini at the European Culture Forum in April 2016 (Interviews 2; 3).

Meanwhile, the European Committee of the Regions (2016) adopted its opinion on 8 February 2017, while the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has scheduled the adoption of its own for June 2017. The Committee of the Regions also organized a stakeholder consultation and included the results in its opinion. In addition to containing important critical observations, both opinions are overwhelmingly positive and constructively argue for even more ambition and further steps. Similarly to the European Parliament, both call on Member States to adopt an effective final strategy. It is also important to note that in most Member States, local and regional authorities are responsible for several sectors addressed in the Joint Communication, especially culture, education, tourism, development, and employment; thus, more than 90 regions have already signalled their interest to participate in its implementation.

With regards to stakeholders, an Administrative Arrangement (EEAS, 2017) was signed in May 2017 for activities to be developed by the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) in partnership with the European Commission Services and the EEAS in order to enhance their cooperation at both headquarters and the local level in partner countries. The text outlines the joint principles, values and objectives, as well as the priority areas of this cooperation, along with implementing arrangements. It is important to note that a cross-cutting approach is encouraged as ‘culture’ here embraces a wide, inclusive range of policies and activities. Going well beyond the arts, it includes, among others, intercultural dialogue, education, creative industries, tourism, heritage, and development cooperation. Joint pilot actions will be developed by the EU Delegations and EUNIC clusters in selected countries where conditions are the most promising, seeking complementarity with stakeholders, civil-society actors, public authorities, and international organisations while respecting the principles of co-creation, bottom-up implementation, and co-financing, whenever possible, from different sources.

To facilitate stakeholders’ involvement and networking among themselves as well as with the relevant institutional players, a Cultural Diplomacy Platform was established already in February 2016, even before the Joint Communication was adopted. This platform is led by a Steering Committee and is funded by the Partnership Instrument (PI, 0,94 MEUR for the period of 2016-2018), with a mandate to cover the planning and implementation of a wide range of cultural activities jointly with all actors. A useful database of best practices was also established to facilitate the further development of EU international cultural relations.

### ***3.2. Internal arrangements to ensure coherence and a long term perspective***

Further to their good cooperation during the drafting process, the responsible European Commission and EEAS services continue internally refining certain initiatives contained in the Joint Communication (Interviews 1; 2; 4). Given its specific nature, this kind of activity tends to fall outside the scope of most research, even though it could lead to important insights for the process as a whole. Follow-up is discussed at regular inter-service meetings, identifying new opportunities and potential problems at a technical level under the guidance of senior hierarchy and, whenever necessary, referring matters to the political level for further debate and decision.

One of the most fundamental issues is ensuring long-term perspective and viability. As implementation relies largely on existing financial instruments, culture would need to feature properly in their programming. At this stage most of them are set in the current Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) until 2020, so for the time being it is more an issue of fitting into the annual cycles. Some of the instruments, like the current regional programmes for culture in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood will expire at the end of 2017, therefore rapid measures would be needed (Interview 5).

However, the much broader question is how to secure funding for the strategy— and for culture in general—in the next MFF from 2021 onwards. In this context, due account should be taken of the fact that culture-related funding has been on the rise among Europe’s global competitors in the race for soft/smart power. Planning has already started for that cycle, and while due to the complexity of the budget negotiations a detailed analysis would go beyond the scope of this paper, experience shows that smooth implementation and the creation of strong ownership within the EC/EEAS as well as among Member States and in the European Parliament would increase chances of achieving a sustainable, long-term financial arrangement in the next MFF. For that to happen, strong alliances would need to be built within and among the respective institutions as well as along the sectorial axis among national administrations. As the available EU funding opportunities are currently scattered across a wide range of different financial instruments handled by different European Commission and EEAS services with different eligibility criteria and timelines, the Joint Communication cannot provide an overall figure for culture-related expenditure. The most ambitious way to bring clarity would be to create a dedicated financial instrument for cultural relations comprising all current allocations with a higher overall level for the next MFF. However, given the political and practical difficulties, this remains unlikely for the time being (Interview 7).

As an elevated role is assigned to EU Delegations across the globe in the implementation phase, it was judged crucial to bring them on board without any delay and to create ownership. Therefore, shortly after the adoption of the new strategies, all were asked for concrete ideas on how to move forward and a special presentation was organized at the EU Ambassadors’ annual conference, both of which resulted in rich input. Contributions and best practises are collected in a designated database in the EEAS HQ, which has the primary responsibility for coordinating this work strand (Interview 2), liaising with relevant Commission services (primarily DG EAC, DEVCO and NEAR, but others such as HOME, CONNECT and TRADE may also be involved as necessary).

In this context the European Public Spaces (EPS) project launched by the European Commission jointly with the European Parliament in 2007—and which by now covers 18 EU Member States—may also provide useful examples of best practices that could be adapted to the local circumstances by Delegations in third countries. The EPS network is based in the EC Representations and the EP Information Offices within the EU and hosts an array of events attracting all generations, with a special focus on youth. Engaging the Member States, synergies were developed with national, regional, and local authorities as well as cultural institutes and NGOs in each participating country. Coordinated by the European Commission and the European Parliament, this network provides a space to ‘host’ European ideas and support unity in diversity adjusted to the different national contexts instead of imposing a uniform European vision.

### ***3.3. The significance of pilot projects in the new strategic approach***

Due to the genealogy and particular nature of the new approach, a number of experiments have already been launched before the final adoption of the Joint Communication itself, which actually refers to examples of recent initiatives pointing towards the new direction. Other projects followed suit in parallel with the debates on the Joint Communication in the EU institutions. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full review, but the selection below should allow a preliminary appreciation of their diversity and characteristics. As the implementation is very much a ‘living process’, beyond their direct purpose they will also serve as guidance for further adjustments along the way in drawing up an integrated strategy. In addition to DG EAC and the EEAS, they mainly originate from DG DEVCO and NEAR which actually have the largest budgets to roll out concrete actions on the ground through their existing financial instruments (listed among the reference documents). A horizontal initiative that is of major importance for many regions and countries that does not require a budget (yet should have significant financial, economic, and societal impact) is planned for the second half of 2017: a legislative proposal to combat the illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

One of the first innovative pilot projects guided by the new approach was launched by DG EAC in 2015 following up on one of the Preparatory Action's recommendations with a budget of EUR 800,000 and with the overall purpose 'to select a body that will set up and support a (digital) Platform for existing networks for young entrepreneurs active in the cultural and creative sectors throughout the world and will facilitate the creation of new ones' (European Commission, 2015a). Its logic is to exploit the considerable potential for culture in Europe's external relations by facilitating cultural engagement with Europe across the world in this sector, which is one of Europe's most dynamic, generating about 4.4 per cent of the total EU GDP and employing 3.8 per cent of the total European workforce. It was expected that benefits for the EU would accrue not only from economic gains through increased market access for European cultural and creative industries, but also from increased cultural diversity and the wider sharing of European values. As a result, a worldwide network of young entrepreneurs from the cultural and creative industries was established that, to date, already counts over 1,000 members from the EU and third countries.

In similar vein, but for the time being on a smaller scale and with a more narrowly-defined target group, the Cultural Diplomacy Platform (CDP) launched a Global Cultural Leadership Programme (prompted and funded jointly by the EC/EEAS from the CDP budget, see 3.1.) in October 2016. At its first session in Malta, the 39 participants came primarily from the ten strategic EU partner countries, while a number of Member State cultural leaders also attended. This 'scene-setter' project was highly appreciated by all participants and generated a number of plans for new projects and collaborations among the countries, stakeholders, individuals, and civic organisations concerned. Building on this momentum, more than 1,000 applications were submitted for the Programme's second session in June 2017 in Athens, and the composition of participants<sup>4</sup> fully reflects the diversity needed to work efficiently in the spirit of the new approach. Beyond the immediate results, this project also serves a long-term objective. By their very nature, cultural diplomacy and cultural relations achieve their impact on a broad time horizon. Although their boundaries are blurred, cultural relations—as delineated by Raj Isar at an EUI (2017) workshop—consist of processes of cultural exchange and cooperation that grow organically, and participants of this project will have a unique potential to create an informal network on their own which may be relied upon at a later stage during formal conducts of cultural diplomacy between states or international organisations or both.

The division of labour between DG DEVCO and NEAR is based primarily on their different geographical responsibilities. Partly as a result, DG NEAR has a more cultural heritage focus, while DEVCO concentrates on the Joint Communication's first two 'workstreams': intercultural dialogue and social and economic development. Within this framework, exchange and mobility programmes are planned as well as activities for strengthening the creative sectors, with special attention on SMEs involved in art projects (EUI 2017: DG DEVCO contribution; Interview 4). Cultural cooperation has been an important part of EU development policy in the past and this was re-affirmed in May 2017 by the Council's adoption of a Commission proposal for a new European Consensus on Development (ECD) (Council of the European Union, 2017b) responding to the UN's 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development from 2015. The 2030 Agenda marked a major global shift in the role of culture in development by acknowledging global citizenship, cultural diversity, and intercultural dialogue as overarching principles for sustainable development. Although there is no specific goal on culture, it is explicitly mentioned in goals related to education, sustainable growth, and consumption patterns (local development/tourism), cities-heritage, and is intrinsically linked to Goal 5 (gender equality). The ECD itself contains a specific point (35) devoted to culture, among other closely related cross-cutting issues like migration (38-42), education (28) or youth (32) in line with the Joint Communication's overall objective to strengthen culture's role in EU international relations. The new projects will be rolled out in this conceptual framework, emphasizing that culture is both an enabler and an important component of development and may facilitate social inclusion, freedom of expression, identity building, civil

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<sup>4</sup> The list of participants can be downloaded from the Cultural Diplomacy Platform ([cultureinexternalrelations.eu](http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu)) under the Global Cultural Leadership Programme: Platform activities, Trainings, 5 May 2017, Selection Results, GCLP 2017.

empowerment and conflict prevention while strengthening economic growth. The new projects will be based on the EU's universal human and democratic values to achieve sustainable development while taking local circumstances into account.

The first large-scale example, a new scheme for EUR 9.7 million (via the DCI – Development Cooperation Instrument), was launched in 2017 by DG DEVCO under the Global Public Goods and Challenges Programme to support cooperation with civil society and local authorities in promoting intercultural dialogue in post-conflict areas and fragile democracies (European Commission, 2017). The global objective is to promote intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, and respect for equal dignity of all people in the project countries. The specific objectives are to i) enhance cultural pluralism and intercultural understanding, and ii) enhance social inclusion and social cohesion (notably of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, minorities, migrants, women and girls, disabled). Culture is used as privileged means for intercultural dialogue, which particularly in fragile contexts, may be effective in overcoming stereotypes, negative perceptions, avoiding polarisation along minority lines or belief or social divides, and promoting social inclusion and social cohesion as well as post-conflict recovery and reconciliation.

Among projects launched earlier—but based on the above principles—the most comprehensive scheme unfolds in Tunisia, with a total budget of EUR 6 million for two years financed by DG NEAR and managed by the EU Delegation. Its first strand aims at cooperating with the national authorities to redefine cultural policy in Tunisia, while the second directly targets the cultural sector and is implemented by the British Council on behalf of, and in cooperation with, the EUNIC network. This project is in line with the principles of the recently-signed 'Administrative Arrangement' as Tunisia is currently the country in the Neighbourhood South region where conditions are most favourable. By promoting cultural diversity and providing access to culture, freedom of expression and creation would also be supported with an emphasis on youth, women, and marginalized groups; this has the obvious broader political purpose of nurturing the democratization process and facilitating stabilization of the country in a highly volatile environment. In line with this, and prompted by the project's success, Tunisia became the first in the region to join the Creative Europe Programme (Council of the European Union, 2017a) as of May 2017. Given its components and attractive content, this cooperation is also considered a model for other countries and regions, wherever possible (Interviews 1; 2; 3; 5).

Reflecting the different circumstances in sub-Saharan Africa, a smaller-scale three-year (2016-2019) strategic cooperation agreement was drawn up between the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the local EU Delegation. Although the agreement itself does not contain a concrete financial commitment, it will be funded primarily by DG DEVCO and the Delegation with the active involvement of EUNIC and national cultural institutes in its implementation. The overall aim is to enter into collaborative artistic projects in several fields and assist the development of a cultural sector/policy, which is currently unstructured and practically without state support. The culture of Congo is rich, diverse, and creative, and the country is open to European culture, although traditionally this has meant an attention to individual countries rather than to the EU as a whole (based on EL-CSID, 2017 notes). It is too early to judge how this will evolve, but if it performs well, it may eventually serve as best practice for some others in that region.

Planning is also under way for 2018. On a horizontal note, the European Year of Cultural Heritage with its own EUR 8 million budget (European Parliament, 2017) will certainly offer ample opportunities for a wide range of international cooperations. As cooperation on cultural heritage is one of the Joint Communication's three main workstreams, strong synergies will be explored; 2018 will also be the first time to roll out a coordinated European Film Festival Programme across the globe. Film festivals are one of the most effective instruments for reaching a mass audience—over 400,000 people on-site each year and 12 million online in China alone. There are currently 76 EU Delegations involved in organizing such events to promote the EU, but in a somewhat discordant fashion. A recent study (KEA, 2015) concluded that a streamlined, strategically coordinated operation both at central

and decentralized levels would lead to major improvements in a cost-effective way. This would entail preparing a package of 15 to 30 recent, high quality, award-winning or box-office-hit European films with proper subtitling and a support scheme for their promotion with the involvement of professionals from the European audiovisual sector at the level of the EEAS HQ. This would be available for all EU Delegations which should tailor their screenings to fit the local contexts in partnership with national actors and side events to increase the collaborative dimension. A concrete EC/EEAS proposition is being worked out along these lines with an appropriate budgetary allocation to be finalized in the coming months (Interviews 1; 2; 3).

Of course each region and country must be evaluated individually, as circumstances can differ radically, even in neighbouring states. What is essential to remember, however, is that all these examples have a clear common thread. None of these actions are about replacing what Member States have been doing well on their own for many years: these are actions where a joint approach brings more benefits than simply what the sum of bilateral initiatives could have delivered. Several national cultural institutes are working together, and the EU is playing a ‘facilitating’ role to enable bottom-up approaches and provide added value. Many players are mobilized, including local authorities and cultural actors, by pooling strengths and resources to bring mutual benefits to everyone involved.

#### **4. Perspectives and relevance of the nascent strategy in a rapidly evolving international and intra-EU**

This paper analysed the gradual development of the EU's international cultural relations in the context of global public diplomacy, exploring also the terminology and use of soft power. While their roots were traced back to the post-World War II quest for peace and a European identity, culture only found a legal base in EU primary law in 1993 in the Maastricht Treaty (Art. 128 TEC), and it took another 16 years before it was further consolidated in the Lisbon Treaty (Art. 167 TFEU). It was shown that in recent decades, international and intra-EU developments have gathered pace embedded in much wider global processes: eroding state sovereignties, the rise of non-governmental actors, and the fast expansion of information technology. Therefore, the EC's ‘European Agenda for Culture in a globalizing world’ created in 2007 the first strategic framework for enhancing the role of culture in the EU's external relations and development policy in a very competitive environment. A growing number of emerging economies are vying against the US and the EU—the ‘traditional masters of soft power’—for influence, and the paper found that EU Member States can only withstand this pressure by acting together.

On the plus side, since 2007 a sustained, cumulative effort of European institutions and cultural entrepreneurs led to the adoption in 2016 of the Joint Communication which responded to the new challenges by advocating a new model for synergic cooperation with Member States, national cultural institutes, and private and public operators, and by introducing a new approach to EU cultural diplomacy focused on the development of genuine international cultural exchanges. A close reading of the stream of subsequent Council, Commission, and European Parliament documents (see sections 1, 3.1.) since 2007 shows how the intention for an increased EU role in this area has evolved with the realization that in today's globalized world, cultural relations must be pursued on the basis of mutual outreach. This is also reflected in the visible shift from projecting individual national cultures to engaging all partners with joint actions based on dialogue, both in terms of the language used (not just in EU documents, but even the British Council switching from ‘showcasing’ to ‘sharecasing’)<sup>5</sup> and in terms of concrete projects (see section 3.3.).

Of course these are only first steps on a long journey that is still fraught with difficulties both outside and within the EU. Internally, an overarching weakness is the general tendency of EU political

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<sup>5</sup> EUNIC intervention at the EUI workshop

and media actors for self-flagellation and projecting a European political culture of negativity. This should be overcome in order to develop and promote a strong counter-narrative based on solid, positive facts that could support the implementation of the Joint Communication. I share the view that publishing the EU's Global Strategy just a few days after the Brexit referendum in a way points in this direction, expressing the belief in a confident and resilient EU (Cross, 2013; Tocci, 2016) as well as re-affirming the need to maintain unity. More specifically, on a practical level, a constructive solution would be necessary for the future role of the British Council in this realm in a post-Brexit scenario. National cultural institutes from smaller Member States should be encouraged to actively participate in EUNIC, both to enhance its outreach and profit from its wider resources. More clarity on the division of tasks between the Member States, the EU, and other international organisations would also be useful to achieve during the Friends of Presidency Group's upcoming discussions, as well as a better definition of target groups, more precise and measurable objectives, and technical implementation modalities. Strengthening the coordination in the EEAS HQ and increasing the management capacities of a significant number of EU Delegations would also require dedicated human and financial resources.

Tackling the above weaknesses would be all the more important in light of the significant external challenges which are partly related to how Europe could be positioned among the new world powers on a rapidly evolving global scene (see also section 2). In this context four interrelated initiatives stand out due to their magnitude, outreach, and broad time-horizon:

- the China-Africa people-to-people and cultural cooperation mechanism (Baohong, 2016) coupled with ever-deepening non-governmental exchanges;
- evolving cooperations in the framework of the Ancient Civilization Forum (Xinhua, 2017b) involving 10 countries representing major ancient civilizations—China, Bolivia, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Mexico, Peru, Greece, and Italy—representing more than 40 per cent of the global population on four continents;
- China's plan to develop its cultural industry into a core pillar of the national economy (China Daily, 2017) with a new internet-based cultural market by 2020 and by upgrading its industrial structure, fostering major brands, and boosting consumption to provide subsidies for the poor to buy cultural products; and,
- the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative to build a trade and infrastructure network along the ancient Silk Road routes which were inscribed on the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List in 2015 (Xinhua, 2017a) and already won the support of over 100 countries. This latter goal coincides with UNESCO's own Silk Road Project launched in 1988 to promote intercultural dialogues and establish links between different cities and civilizations along the historic trade route.

Advancing cultural cooperation with highly developed strategic partners (US, Canada, Japan, and South Korea) will certainly require a different approach, including individual strategies and tactics tailored for each region and country-level plans. The 54 country studies contained in the Preparatory Action can be a good starting point, but further research is needed, respecting the principles, values, and objectives in the 'Administrative Arrangement' between EUNIC and the EC/EEAS. In this framework, EUNIC has already identified a number of challenges in certain regions, among which those facing sub-Saharan Africa seem to be the most daunting (see EL-CSID, 2017). There is a growing tendency to turn away from 'the global North' as a primary system of reference towards a pan-African dialogue and a dialogue with the 'global South' in order to review history and develop original African positions. This is also related to on-going reflections on post-colonial issues, including the power relationship between 'North and South'. Approaching cultural policies as the preservation of traditions as well as spurs for creative economies and potential for enabling artistic freedom and mobility offers areas of cooperation, albeit keeping in mind the severe constraints posed by an almost non-existent cultural infrastructure (except in some of the largest cities). In this context, in addition to China, increased activity can be observed by new actors like Turkey, Brazil, and

Morocco (EUNIC intervention at the Malta workshop), which requires attention and thoughtful reaction by Europe, for which the nascent strategy could serve as a useful vehicle.

## **Concluding remarks**

In view of the above it is clear that a fragmented EU with individual Member States acting on their own stands little chance of influencing these global movements across and within other continents. It is equally clear that Europe as a whole should urgently deploy its plentiful, diverse, and innovative cultural and creative assets to remain a key actor on the international scene. In this framework, the Joint Communication is highly timely, and I conclude that the unprecedented ‘twin track approach’ of cultural and foreign policy agents working closely together has the capacity to take the nascent strategy further than many previous initiatives in the cultural field. Nevertheless, an unambiguous support from Member States, and consistent, sustained efforts will be needed to make this a reality on the ground. In the past, Commissioners for Culture (similarly to cultural ministers in Member States) generally had few powerful allies to ‘push their files’ and were unable to maintain the necessary political momentum to deliver. With the Lisbon Treaty, the institutional dynamics have changed (see Duke, 2016; Spence & Bátorá, 2015), the European External Action Service was established, and fully fledged EU Delegations were created that are generally well placed to play a key role in implementing concrete projects. Dedicated financial resources were made available for 2017-2018, primarily for Delegations in the strategic partner countries, and the process of nominating specialized staff has also started, but will need time to be completed. In addition to the two lead actors— EU HRVP Frederica Mogherini and Commissioner Tibor Navracsics, responsible for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport—two other Commissioners, Neven Mimica for International Cooperation and Development and Johannes Hahn for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, have also put their weight behind the nascent strategy. This actually reflects the *modus operandi* of the Juncker Commission in general, which applies a more thematic, cross-cutting approach to accentuate the interconnection of policies, coherence across sectors, and the importance of political coordination. This also means that the strategy is embedded in the ten priorities of the Commission—the ninth, aims at making the EU a stronger global actor.

Of course this new constellation, however promising it may be, still cannot guarantee a successful outcome on its own. Critics can point to deficiencies and argue that it is more wishful thinking than a depiction of current realities dominated by Brexit, an upsurge of authoritarian nationalism, as well as the economic and migration crises. References are made to the declining strength of a liberal cooperative order (Higgott, 2017) versus a mushrooming scene of populist and nativist agendas with an exclusionary mindset. Some Member States are more reluctant than others to embrace the paradigm shift to engage in collaborative projects to increase mutual understanding with peoples outside the EU. In other parts of the world, especially in post-colonial states, a sense of resentment still lingers concerning any perceived sign of ‘Western/European cultural superiority’ which may impede implementation (Van Langenhove & Higgott, 2016).

However, the Joint Communication can also be interpreted as a timely reminder to uphold the fundamental values of European integration (Kausch, 2016) even under very difficult circumstances. No one wants to claim that culture on its own can provide solutions to all of the world’s ills (Figueira, 2016), but not using its potential to contribute to addressing major global challenges would certainly be a missed opportunity. It is more ‘en vogue’ to envisage impending problematic scenarios and join the flow of overarching meta-narratives of an EU in decline than to search for bright spots, often labelled as uninteresting or propagandistic. But if no one goes against the grain, it could become self-fulfilling prophecy. Notwithstanding the obvious and manifold difficulties, I contend that the proposed new approach to focus on developing genuine cultural relations in a strategic EU cultural diplomatic framework could contribute towards mitigating some of the negative effects of the multiple crises. As also argued at a workshop organized at the EUI (2017), an efficient crisis public diplomacy should rest on a long-term foundation, and cultural diplomacy is one of the long-term strategies for creating such

a buffer. The ultimate challenge of the coming years would be to achieve a more inclusive, just, and sustainable European Union that is able to tackle inequality, consolidate its economy, better shape globalization, and reinforce its actions and image on the international scene. For almost 60 years, the EU has been considered a model of peace and prosperity. But today an urgent response is needed to the interlinked crises. Most analyses agree (Zakaria, 2016) that while rising inequality has been an important factor fuelling the populist support expressed in the Brexit referendum as well as in the US elections, the key issue was cultural. A recent opinion survey (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016) shows that ‘fear of globalization is the decisive factor behind demands for changes away from the political mainstream’. After the globalization of trade, information, and services, the globalization of people—manifesting itself in the migration crisis—is the final stage of a long process that is seen by an overwhelming majority across all Member States and the US as the most disruptive. When people are directly confronted with major cultural changes and uncertainties, most tend to look for protection and familiarity thus leading to a reinforcement of national, local, ethnic, or religious identities, values, and narratives as well as questioning the EU’s added value or rejecting it outright.

This shows that in times of crises a kind of re-nationalization—however delusionary this may be—of the European public discourse and sphere occurs, contrary to the Europeanization of the national public discourses and spheres desired by the founding fathers of the European construction. At the same time, it is clear that a divided Europe would put at risk its historic achievements and in the medium to long run would become unable to remain a leading actor on the global stage. Given the (re)emerging national (and regional or local) narratives on the one hand and the compelling case for (re)establishing a united vision to maintain global influence on the other, strengthening the EU’s symbolic and cultural dimension could help reinforce a sense of belonging to Europe. Europeans can build on the continent’s vibrant professional cultural sector and its longstanding tradition of nurturing creativity. In terms of culture and lifestyle, a public survey (European Commission, 2015b) found that EU countries were seen as belonging to the most attractive worldwide by more than 70 per cent of respondents in all ten of the EU’s strategic partner countries, including Russia. As shown in this paper, conducting international cultural relations on a new basis fits into the broader framework of the EU’s public diplomacy efforts, and the European External Action Service is well-positioned to improve its coherence. The primary role assigned to EU Delegations in implementing the new strategic approach corresponds to their greater potential to increase the EU’s visibility and scope of action as parts of the second-largest foreign service in the world. Blending the transformative power of culture into high politics across the globe may also bolster strategic thinking and engage the young generation, especially, if coupled with an organic, strong, trans-national engagement through digital tools and the social media.

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***List of interviews with EU and Member State officials***

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Interview 2: Senior EU official, European External Action Service (EEAS), February and May 2017.

Interview 3: Senior EU official, European Commission, Member of Cabinet, February 2017.

Interview 4: Senior EU official, European Commission, DG Development Cooperation (DEVCO), February and May 2017.

Interview 5: Senior EU official, European Commission, DG European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR), February 2017

Interview 6: Member State diplomat, Member of the Council's Cultural Affairs Committee, April 2017.

Interview 7: Senior EU official, Council of the EU, General Secretariat, April 2017.

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