



Advocacy Paper

EU cultural relations with its Southern Neighbours

This paper aims to highlight the role of culture and the arts in the European Neighbourhood Policy, in particular with the Southern Mediterranean countries. In light of the recent EU policy developments on international cultural relations, this paper exposes, with examples of successful EU projects and activities, (i) the contribution of culture to employment in the region, (ii) the impact of strengthened cultural relations to prevent conflict and violent extremism while promoting peace and reconciliation, and (iii) the role of such cultural relations in reinforcing human rights and democracy. It also recommends some concrete actions to be taken at regional level.

Several major recent European policy documents acknowledge the significant role of culture in the relations between the European Union (EU) and its Neighbours. Indeed, and as highlighted by *MORE EUROPE*'s contribution to the public consultation on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2015, cultural relations have a significant impact on conflict prevention and peace-building, the development of creative industries, job creation, the reinforcement of dialogue between societies, the strengthening of freedom of expression and the support of social, human and economic development, which are all objectives of the external policies of the EU, including the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

- ✓ The proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the import of cultural goods (July 2017) aiming at stopping imports in the Union of cultural goods illicitly exported from their country of origin. It acknowledges the great artistic, historical and archaeological value these goods hold for their countries and communities of origin.
- ✓ The Joint Communication of the European Commission and the European External Action Service "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations" (June 2016), which recognises that many ENP countries face protracted challenges such as political tension, economic upheaval, violent radicalisation and migratory flows, and underlines that, in this context, cultural cooperation and exchange on cultural policies can contribute to stabilisation and sustainable transformation.
- ✓ The Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions "Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy" (18 November 2015), which declares that, in view of preventing radicalisation, and countering violent extremism, stepping-up cross-cultural dialogue and more broadly promoting intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity and mutual understanding will be key.
- ✓ The EP resolution on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (9 July 2015), which emphasises the importance of cultural dialogue between the EU and its neighbouring countries in areas such as conflict prevention and peace-building, and thus calls for strengthening the frameworks for cultural relations, enabling the development of programmes for mobility, training and capacity-building and exchanges in the fields of culture and education.
- ✓ The New Work Plan for Culture 2015-2018, adopted on 25 November 2014 by the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport), which makes culture in the EU's external relations a priority, particularly in its relations with the ENP countries.
- ✓ The 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, by which the EU committed to affirm the importance and benefits of cultural diversity and the co-existence of differences, especially in regions where these are particularly threatened.

However, these political commitments have yet to be translated into a consistent regional strategy for European cultural relations with its Neighbours, and in particular with the MENA region.¹ As a matter of fact, not only is the broad policy framework of the European relations with its Neighbourhood laid out in a complex set of bilateral agreements, communications, conclusions and declarations of EU institutions² - which may be a hindrance for consistency and coherence – but also, when it comes to cultural relations, many actions and programmes have not (yet?) been re-launched or renewed.

For instance, key regional programmes such as MedCulture, which supports capacity-building for cultural and creative operators in the MENA region, were expected to end in January 2018 with no proper follow-up or successor initiatives, despite successful results. Although the MedCulture contract shall be extended for another year (*i.e.* until early 2019), this extension does not ensure any long-term visibility or sustainability for the programme, regardless of the high expectations it has created among the cultural stakeholders of the MENA region.

This situation raises the issue of the sustainability of the current programmes and actions of the EU, as well as of the actual implementation of the political commitments taken in the above-mentioned policy documents.

MedCulture

MedCulture is the EU-funded regional programme dedicated to Culture for Southern Mediterranean countries, initially scheduled for 2014-early 2018, with a budget of 12.5 million euros. It includes a technical assistance unit and a scheme of grantees and sub-grantees to fund micro-projects. Through a participatory approach, it aims to promote a dynamic, well-informed cultural sector, marked by improved governance, while favouring exchanges and networking at national and regional levels.

It has worked more specifically on broadening the base for participation in policy reform and governance, promoting the social and economic impact of culture, and strengthening the regional integration, communication and networking.

In particular, it has achieved to:

- ✓ bring government and independent/civil society stakeholders together, facilitating exchanges and collaborations on the long term, notably in Jordan and Lebanon, hereby contributing to the development of National Strategies for Culture in these two countries;
- ✓ empower decision-makers and cultural practitioners, with a focus on youth, through thematic peer-to-peer capacity-development activities (impacting 350 beneficiaries);
- ✓ promote regional mobility and networking at national and regional levels (1.369 beneficiaries of MedCulture’s support for regional mobility);
- ✓ contribute to a broader knowledge of the cultural scene in the region, through the establishment of an online 360° overview website (approx. 120.000 users as of March 2017) and a monthly newsletter (3.356 subscribers as of March 2017) focussed on worldwide opportunities for cultural operators and artists.

¹ Riccardo Trobbiani, “EU Cultural Diplomacy in the MENA region: a qualitative mapping of initiatives promoting regional cooperation”, *EL-CSID Working paper, issue 2017/2*, April 2017, https://media.wix.com/ugd/0bc3be_e5fc181a732441bf84e1e013b6723322.pdf.

² Particip in consortium with Ecorys, ECDPM, Fiscus, Itad and Oxford Policy Management, *External Evaluation of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (2014-mid 2017)*, June 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/evaluation-european-neighbourhood-instrument-draft-report_en.

Cultural relations to support employment in the region

Supporting the cultural sector in the MENA region will contribute to achieve other goals of the ENP and the general foreign policy of the EU, such as reducing poverty, ensuring sustainable development and promoting democracy, peace and security.

The cultural sector, in particular the cultural and creative industries, create employment and generate revenues,³ hereby not only reducing the drive to migration but also generating revenues and catalyzing creativity, innovation and evolution in the societies. Culture and innovation play in their turn a crucial role in helping regions to attract investments, creative talents and tourism, creating a virtuous circle in terms of economic and social development.

Support to the cultural and creative industries (for instance, via the EU-funded regional project ‘Development of Clusters in Cultural and Creative Industries in the Southern Mediterranean’)⁴ and, more generally, to employability in the cultural and creative sectors in Arab Mediterranean countries (e.g. through MedCulture capacity-building activities) should therefore be continued, developed and strengthened, possibly along the following lines:

1. Improving the attractiveness and the quality of Vocational and Educational Training,
2. Better preparing higher education institutions, in order to reduce the skills mismatch,
3. Increasing and restructuring the budget of the ministries of culture,
4. Improving the synergy between the local and international scene,
5. Promoting inclusive policies, for better jobs in the cultural and creative sector.⁵

Besides, the local strengths and unique specificities of the ‘traditional sectors’ such as design-based industries (e.g. fashion, jewellery, furniture, home textile, etc.) need to be

Encouraging traditional arts and crafts to preserve culture and boost economies

Exp. MEDNETA, a Mediterranean cultural network to promote creativity in the arts, crafts and design for communities’ regeneration in historical cities.

Countries: Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Palestine, Spain, Tunisia

Dates: 2014-2015

Budget: 1.985.553€, 90% funded by ENPI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Prog. 2007-2013

www.medneta.eu

By encouraging local arts, crafts and designs, the MEDNETA sought to encourage young people to revive old traditions, and promote a market for those crafts, thereby creating employment for craftspeople and maintaining cultural heritage.

Key figures:

- ✓ 12 SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) seminars and open workshops involving local stakeholders in the fields of arts, crafts and design,
- ✓ 3 workshop-training programmes in Tunisia, Beirut and Hebron,
- ✓ 1 Lab Network and 1 guide on strengthening this network between arts, crafts and design stakeholders.

ENPI CBC Med Programme, ‘MEDNETA, encouraging traditional arts and crafts to preserve culture and boost economies’, *Mediterranean Stories on cultural heritage and sustainable tourism*, December 2014.

http://www.enpicbcmec.eu/sites/default/files/mediterranean_stories_cultural_heritage_and_sustainable_tourism_0.pdf.

³ KEA, *Economy of Culture in Europe 2006*. <http://www.keanet.eu/ecoculture/studynew.pdf>; and

TERA Consultants, *Analysing the economic impact of cultural spending on the GDP*, 2011, http://www.forum-avignon.org/sites/default/files/editeur/Etude_Tera_Consultants_Forum_avignon_2011_GB.pdf.

⁴ CCI Clusters - Supporting the development of clusters in cultural and creative industries in the Southern Mediterranean, www.medcreative.org.

⁵ Nizar Hariri and Grâce Kassis, *Employability in the cultural and creative sectors in Arab Mediterranean countries: The cases of Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco*, MedCulture Programme, June 2016, http://www.medculture.eu/sites/default/files/thematic-studies/employabilitystudy_en.pdf.

further valorised,⁶ especially as they hold a strong potential with regards to a global market increasingly turned towards fair trade and non-industrial products.

Cultural relations to prevent conflict and violent extremism, and promote peace and reconciliation

Supporting cultural relations between Europe and its Southern Neighbours contributes to promoting peace and reconciliation and preventing conflict as well as violent extremism. Indeed, because arts and culture generally challenge entrenched authoritarian and totalitarian belief,⁷ foster freedom of expression, and assert cultural identity and a rich and diverse cultural heritage, they hold a crucial role in creating resilience against extremist and violent ideologies.

Arts, culture and cultural exchanges contribute strongly to the creation of individual or collective social capital by building and strengthening social networks and, in the approach of several social scientists and counter-terrorism experts, social capital is precisely one of the most crucial variables for individual and collective resilience.⁸

The importance of culture and inter-cultural dialogue, especially with youth, in the prevention of violent extremism is already recognised at the UN level, for instance in the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015).⁹ It is also acknowledged in the two latest Annual Action Plans of the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (2016 and 2017). The AAP 2016, in particular, identifies culture as a strong tool to reinforce *“resilience amongst individuals and communities to messages and movements inimical to inclusive peace-building and social transformation as well as to accommodation of the ‘other’”*, and calls to

Creating safe spaces for encounters, discussions and collaborations

Exp. [e-Twinning Plus](#), a platform promoting school collaboration between the EU and some of its Neighbouring countries through the use of ICT. It provides a safe, online environment to engage with partner schools, develop common projects and communicate with like-minded educational professionals.

In Tunisia, for examples, the project “Ensemble traçons notre future / Charting Our future together / Trazamos juntos nuestro futuro” connected pupils from 14 schools in 7 countries to work together through ICT (videoconferences, chats, e-mails, etc.) and chart the future they want in fields as varied as social relations, education, lifestyles, the environment, etc. According to the teachers involved, it allowed the pupils to discover and practice foreign languages, to practice tolerance and respect of other cultures, and to develop their creativity.

eTwinning Plus was labelled as a *“vaccination against radicalisation and violent extremism”* by M. Rodrigo Ballester, staff member of the cabinet of Commissioner Navracsics (Education, Culture, Youth and Sports), during a conference at the European Committee of the Regions on 22 May 2017.

Regional Initiative for Culture and Creativity, Conference *“Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations: a regional contribution”*, European Committee of the Regions, 22 May 2017, <http://cor.europa.eu/en/events/Pages/Towards-an-EU-strategy-for-international-cultural-relations--A-regional-contribution.aspx>.

⁶ CCI Clusters, *Mapping of Clusters in Cultural and Creative industries in the Southern Mediterranean*, 2014, http://www.cci-clusters.org/sites/default/files/CCI_%20Mapping_Results%20english.pdf.

⁷ Patricio Jeretic, *EU Final Study Report on projects using cultural expressions as a lever for employment, human rights, democracy and other human development areas*, European Commission, 18 March 2014, <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/culture-and-development-international-cooperation/event/release-eu-study-report-projects-using-cultural-expressions-lever-employment-human-rights-demo#sthash.kvhYKD4O.dpuf>.

⁸ Interview in June 2017 with Susan Szmania, Senior Researcher, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), University of Maryland, <http://www.start.umd.edu/people/susan-szmania>, in Asiem El Difraoui, *The crucial role of culture and the arts in the Southern Neighbourhood of the European Union*, MORE EUROPE – external cultural relations, 2017.

⁹ “Security Council, Unanimously Adopting Adopting Resolution 2250 (2015), Urges Member States to Increase Representation of Youth in Decision-Making at All Levels”, *United Nations Coverage and Press Releases*, 9 December 2015, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>.

specific attention to be placed on “*promoting cultural activity as a ‘space of safety’ for exploring and encouraging positive interaction between individuals, peoples and communities as part of peace-building*”.¹⁰

The IcSP, however, is mostly designed as an instrument meant to provide short-term assistance in countries where a crisis is unfolding. However, considering the current political instability in the region – favouring the rise of extremist organisations – and the impacts it already has in Europe, preventing violent extremism through enhanced cultural relations therefore needs to be more structurally embedded in the long-term objectives of both the ENP and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).

Cultural relations to strengthen human rights and democracy

Culture constitutes a solid pillar for democracy and human rights, through identity building, promotion of active citizenship and social cohesion.

In many countries of the EU’s Southern Neighbourhood, artistic freedom and freedom of expression are under constant threat from repressive authorities or intolerant actors in the society. Yet, supporting culture as a specific sector would also strengthen these European/universal values such as peace, democracy, the respect of diversity, intercultural dialogue, freedom of expression, *etc.* The Euromed Audiovisual Programme, for instance, initially designed as an economic and cultural programme, had an impact on political awareness in the region, in particular thanks to a better and more open circulation of documentaries, programmes and films covering human rights, governance and political-related issues.¹¹

Structurally integrating culture and funding for the cultural sector in the ENP and the ENI would also allow the EU to gain trust and retain credibility in defending those values – for instance when campaigning against censorship and harassment of journalists, researchers, and civil society organisations –

Reinforcement of human rights through a stronger cultural sector

Exp. [Drama, Diversity and Development](#)

Countries: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia

Dates: 2014-2017

Budget: 85.000€

<https://actfordiversity.org/>

The Drama, Diversity and Development project, funded under the MedCulture programme, has been aiming at promoting diversity and at challenging discrimination against minorities through street theatre performances. The project financed:

- ✓ 13 street theatre projects,
- ✓ 2 regional training events to strengthen the capacities of the grantee organisations,
- ✓ 1 regional film,
- ✓ 10 advocacy projects on abuses of / increased respect for cultural rights,
- ✓ feasibility studies on the use of legal remedies against the abuse of cultural and other related human rights, particularly affecting minorities in Southern Mediterranean countries.

Cultural rights are a category of human rights aiming at ensuring that all people, without discrimination, can freely access, participate and contribute to cultural life. They are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the UN Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and are protected by a number of international treaties, at the international and regional levels.

¹⁰ European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, *ANNEX I of the Commission Implementing Decision on the 2016 Annual Action Programme for the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace – Conflict prevention, peace-building and crisis preparedness component (Article 4)*, 2016, pp. 9-10, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/documents/20160518_aap_2016_icsp_art.4_en.pdf.

¹¹ *EU Final Study Report on projects using cultural expressions as a lever for employment, human rights, democracy and other human development areas*, op. cit., Annex III – Good Practice Project Fiches, p.10.

especially as they are at the heart of the new Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy.¹²

The regional dimension

The bulk of EU support in these countries has been based on regional instruments, programmes and activities, next to bilateral envelopes. In the cultural field, these decades-long European programmes achieved relatively weak results, because of political tensions and economic gaps in the region. Many regional programmes have therefore been terminated in the recent years. The Euromed Heritage programme, for example, was established in 1998 and concluded its fourth phase in 2013. Euromed Audiovisual too, created in 2000, ended after its third phase in 2014. Euromed Youth, created in 1999, has also recently terminated, as many other such programmes.

Although the regional approach of the EU with the Southern Mediterranean has always been faced with political turmoil and a wide diversity of in-country situations, it has created strong networks between the MENA countries as well as between these countries and Europe. It has also generated high expectations for sustainable support to regional exchanges and cooperation, in particular among youth and within the cultural sector.

Even though it is clear that the one-size-fits-all approach applied until now has its limits, we still strongly believe that regional programmes should be sustained, while their objectives and methodologies be revised and redefined in order to adapt to the most recent changes in the region, as well as to the needs of the cultural sector. Privileging only bilateral programmes risks to create disconnection and imbalances within the cultural sector(s) across the region, but also unhealthy competition between operators from the South – leaving behind some countries with less-structured cultural sectors, and less access to regional or international exchanges and cooperation.

Besides, such regional programmes in the cultural field should coherently interact with the competent regional organisations and structures, especially the Anna Lindh Foundation and the Union for the Mediterranean, whenever appropriate.

¹² *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/global-strategy-foreign-and-security-policy-european-union>.

Recommendations for achieving sustainable, fair and balanced cultural relations between Europe and its Southern Neighbours

1. **Develop a truly consistent regional strategy for European cultural relations with its Neighbours**, in line with the most recent commitments taken at EU level.
2. **Appoint a coordinator in charge for cultural matters within DG NEAR**, who would act as a contact point for all relevant stakeholders working on EU cultural relations with the Neighbourhood countries, and ensure the consistency of DG NEAR's cultural action. This person could also help liaise with the European External Action Service, other DGs, the European Parliament as well as the Member States on these issues, thus allowing DG NEAR to play a much bigger role in helping to support and coordinate the on-going orchestrated efforts for developing the EU's international cultural relations.
3. **Promote mobility** and networking at regional level, in order to open channels for people-to-people exchange and the circulation of individuals and projects. This would include visa facilitation of artists and cultural operators.
4. **Improve communication**, including by elaborating a specific communication strategy adapted to each country's national and local authorities, and providing multi-lingual online resources on cultural relations and programmes to the cultural operators while also inviting users to contribute to the content.
5. **Coordinate with other EU bilateral and regional programmes, as well as other donors active in the region**, dealing with policy reform and capacity-building in the cultural sector.
6. **Support institutional, personal and professional capacity-building** aimed at learning and developing cultural management skills, especially for youth.
7. **Strengthen knowledge transfer and mutual learning between the broad range of stakeholders** involved in cultural relations between the EU and its Southern Neighbours: the European Commission and its different services – including the EU Delegations –, the EU Member States, the national and local authorities in the MENA countries, civil society organisations, the private sector, other international organisations, *etc.*
8. **Stimulate and support cultural policy development** in the MENA countries, in order to create a positive context and climate for cultural activity and better exploit the potential of the impact of culture on social and economic development. The EU has a role to play as a mediator facilitating dialogue between all parties involved in policy development, especially authorities and civil society.