
From Who We Are to What We Do Together and How Avenues for European external cultural relations

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Being Europeans in today's world

Talking of identities is always controversial. Between ontological theories and constructivist approaches¹, tons of research work has shown that identities remain a debatable concept. Sociologists have demonstrated that one individual carries several identities simultaneously, and uses them alternatively depending on the interlocutors. Philosophical approaches have also diverged in approaching the concept, some looking at it through the prism of constitutional policy-building (HABERMAS), other like a “*dialogical experience, an hologram and an organizational recursion*” (MORIN). Political scientists and novelists have studied the way identities are used and manipulated in power struggles.²

As for Europe, there has not been agreement so far on the way to define it. It is a debatable concept which cannot be grasped by geography, since there is no consensus on a clear cut identification of European borders.³ Europe could well be defined as a political project, but this approach is not convincing either because of the existence of European entities (Norway, Switzerland or Ukraine) that are not part of it.

Europe may perhaps be a “*value system*”⁴ with its roots to be found in the Renaissance, humanism and the Enlightenment, the tradition of “*critical thinking*” (underlined by Berthold FRANKE⁵ in Paris), but such a system is itself an evolving notion, not exempt from intrinsic paradoxes and contradictions. **Michel LE BRIS**⁶ reminded us that Western European intellectuals, by being unable to digest the experiences of European totalitarianism, find it actually hard to concretely stand up for European values in cases of crisis like in Former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. And Europe is not any more one mere component of a mythic homogeneous “West” either. Our starting point could perhaps be

¹ BAUMAN states that “*identity is fluid within liquid modernity*”, as quoted by Farid TABARKI & Rindert DE GROOT in *EUNIC Yearbook 2011*, p.155. The authors consider that “*Maybe we have to forget about a clear-cut definition of what Europe is, who belongs to it, and what is in it for you and me*”.

² Amin MAALOUF, *Les identités meurtrières*. See also the debates on HUNTINGTON's *Clash of civilisations*.

³ Michel FOUCHER, *EUNIC Yearbook*. Michel FOUCHER is a French geographer who has extensively written on borders and Europe's borders.

⁴ World Values Surveys however show that several value systems co-exist within Europe. World Value Survey Cultural Map 2005-2008, http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs/articles/folder_published/article_base_54.

⁵ Participant to the MORE EUROPE Paris debate

⁶ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Writer, Philosopher & Director Festival « Étonnants Voyageurs »

to consider Europe as a myth (as a Greek one, but also as a “*community of destinies*” like **Christopher MILES**⁷ said), the main function of it being to foster narratives, avenues for action, systems of meaning, imaginations. The challenge is thus to avoid forms of “*intellectual provincialism (...) stuck in modernist thinking*” and to reinterpret the European tradition of “*radical political thinking*”, as **Moukhtar KOCACHE**⁸ stated in the Paris More Europe conference.

For **Julia KRISTEVA**⁹, who opened the debate on European cultural identities in Paris on the 23rd of May, Europeans have a particular conception of identity. They see it as “*an invitation to assert the existence of something and to question it indefinitely*”. As Europeans, we should therefore “*not forget the wealth of the interrogation of our identity which implies a re-evaluation of our legacy.*”¹⁰ For **KRISTEVA**, European cultural legacy is a mixed of “*guiltiness and pride*” and Europeans “*have the obligation not to sell Human Rights to the world, but to discuss them permanently and to share them when interacting with other cultures.*”

Debating “*European identity*” or “*European culture*” should thus rather be an incentive for a constantly evolving collective debate and narrative than a search for consensus or even worse, a unanimously and nowhere to be found¹¹ shared definition. Addressing contradictions between Europeans about the value they give to culture, for instance in their trade relations, as **Christopher MILES** underlined in Paris, is also crucial to understand whether they “*still have some esteem for it*” (**Radu MIHĂILEANU**¹²). Yet, Europeans feel European, even more so when they are said to be collectively in decline¹³, and seem to be perceived as such by the outside world. It is perhaps in their confrontation to the other that Europeans should look for what binds them.

One of the challenges for the building up of European cultural external relations lies in the balance to be found between flexible approaches to “*European identities*” and strategic ambitions to project Europe in the world. Instead of looking for ready-made and universally agreed definitions, Europeans should rather focus on the ways they interact between themselves and with non-Europeans, on what is shared, mixed and clashed on the “*surface of contacts*” with others, rather than on the ungraspable material constituting an hypothetical and mythical European “*core*”.

Non-Europeans perceive us through our actions and behaviour, and through our history and heritage. The way Europeans handle their historical legacy with the rest of the world is one area to

⁷ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Vice Secretary General French Ministry of Culture & Communication

⁸ Participant to the MORE EUROPE Paris debate

⁹ MORE EUROPE patron, panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Writer, Psychoanalyst, Prof. at the University Paris-Diderot

¹⁰ <http://www.kristeva.fr/Europe.html>

¹¹ Dialogue between Régis DEBRAY and Frédéric MARTEL, in *EUNIC Yearbook 2011*, pp. 28-36. Debray states: “*In Europe we have national cultures, plus American culture, but we don’t have the European culture which is supposed to build a bridge between the two.*”, p. 32.

¹² MORE EUROPE patron, panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Film Director & screenwriter

¹³ Richard YOUNGS, *Europe’s Decline and fall*. Robert PALMER in *EUNIC Yearbook 2011*: “*The overriding motive for action might be the growing realization that Europe is a declining global force economically, militarily and in relation to other multipolar influences*”, p. 92.

be further explored¹⁴. The example of the Shoah Memorial as an experience to build up a European policy of memory could inspire further action in other domains of European memory, **Luc LÉVY**¹⁵ argued.

Is there an European way to deal with contemporary challenges dealt with on the global and international agenda? Do Europeans have a common vision of their bilateral relations with non-European powers? The answers are obviously mixed and conditional to specific contexts and circumstances. Some speakers in Paris called for a “*renewed humanism*” able to engage in a dialogue with various religious communities, for instance in the framework of a European academy on cultural diversity and multilinguism and a yearly forum on European cultural identity (**KRISTEVA**). Others suggested a “*spiritual secular*” approach to counter balance “*unbounded materialism*” on one side and “*religious fanatics*” on the other (**Radu MIHĂILEANU**). On a day to day basis, some measures could be taken to ensure that Europeans are offered more opportunities to interact with each other and with the outside world, for example through a European volunteering scheme¹⁶ already promoted by numerous intellectuals in Europe, and recalled by **Sebastian KRÖBER**¹⁷ in the MORE EUROPE Paris debate.

Towards a common “cultural diplomacy”?

Even though defining European identity is an unsolvable challenge, Europeans are however perceived as such abroad, although in very diverse ways. They also, according to some experts, should be proactive to react to their ongoing cultural decline (illustrated *inter alia* by the latest BBC polls showing a decrease in positive perceptions about European States in the world) against the growing influence of other global cultural powers. One of the ways to do so is to develop new forms of cultural policies in the world, while being aware that “*a common European cultural policy is not the same as a common European culture*”¹⁸. “*Europe needs new pictures to recognise itself, it needs new songs and new words*” stated **Sebastian KRÖBER** in Paris, recalling us Wim WENDERS’ speech on a soul for Europe.¹⁹

EU Member States have developed very diverse cultural policy models abroad within which foreign affairs authorities have enjoyed a varying degree of domination over cultural bodies. Some have split foreign policy and external cultural relations and created autonomous cultural agencies, like the British Council or the Goethe Institute. Others have kept a strong political control over external cultural policies, like in France. Other countries have a very small network of cultural representation and the scope of their international cultural relations is very narrow, like in Central European countries. Europe’s cultural diplomacies prove so heterogeneous that it is far from obvious to imagine a common collective European cultural diplomacy or external cultural policy approach.

¹⁴ Gottfried LANGENSTEIN and Robert MENASSE, MORE EUROPE Berlin debate, 2 May 2012.

¹⁵ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, International relations officer, Shoah Memorial, Paris

¹⁶ <http://manifest-europa.eu/category/allgemein?lang=fr>

¹⁷ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Vice Secretary General ifa (Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations)

¹⁸ Jurko PROCHASKO, *EUNIC Yearbook 2011*, p.76.

¹⁹ <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1098.html>

Against this background, **Alain FOHR**²⁰ admitted that he is “*not convinced by the Monet method applied to cultural policies since culture is not coal and steel*”.

Besides various kinds of political control over cultural policies, policy practices also present a diverse range of features, as shown by **Rod FISCHER**²¹, who has underlined that although some paradigm shift from cultural diplomacy towards cultural relations is underway in a number of country, a lot of definitional confusion about such terms as cultural diplomacy, cultural cooperation, cultural exchange, cultural relations, public diplomacy and soft power is still taking place. Europeans cultural experts actually seem to disagree on the meaning of such concepts, as acknowledged by **Delphine BORIONE**²², who sought to make the case for a modernised, open-minded and cooperative cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, many in Europe still consider that external cultural policies are an exclusive national competence and must not be dealt with at European level, contradicting existing treaty provisions mentioning the external cultural dimensions of European integration. Indeed, on paper, and in past ministerial declarations, Member States and EU institutions have made clear statements in favour of more clearly fleshed out EU’s external cultural policies, based on new visions and strategic ambitions.

This being said, one needs to acknowledge that several dynamics are colliding in the debate about a European cultural diplomacy. First, what is not clear is the scope of EU’s external action addressed by this debate: should it be EU’s external relations (including development aid, trade, economic and financial policies)? Or should it be only EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)? Should it cover EU policies as well as EU Member States’ national external policies?

Second, there is a need to clarify what sort of cultural dimension we are talking about: is it public communication about external policies? Is it national and European cultural branding? Is it the promotion of Europe’s cultural heritage and production, touristic potential and of best practice applied at local level? Or is it the spreading of European fundamental values and the conduct of intercultural dialogue?

Thirdly, the debate is also about the degree of Europeanisation given to cultural action, might it be cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, cultural relations or cultural cooperation. Let’s not forget that many small EU countries are not culturally represented abroad, and that this constitutes a strong argument for some shared European action. Furthermore, the alignment of numerous national external cultural agencies has a cost that Member states feel increasingly hard to bear in time of crisis. Under such constraints, how far do Europeans want to go in the sharing of their national work, the mutualisation of certain cultural practices and in some cases the transfer of sovereignty, as **Alain FOHR** acknowledged, to European structures?

Two archetypical approaches seem to oppose each other: one based on state-centred cultural policies referred to mainly as cultural diplomacy, and the other based on initiatives from

²⁰ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Director Institut français in Spain

²¹ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Director International Intelligence on Culture Agency

²² Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Director of Cultural & Language Policies, French Ministry of Foreign & European Affairs; Vice President of EUNIC Global

independent cultural workers supported by various partners – public or private – referred to as cultural relations. There is clearly a tension between these two models, but in a way there is a lot of hypocrisy in pretending that cultural relations are not also about some sort of national branding and that there is no self-interest in them. Otherwise they would just not happen. The question is less either or, cultural relations or cultural diplomacy, but the conditions / principles under which the cultural relation is based: reciprocity, mutuality, exchange, cooperation. There is no obligation for those who do not want to work with public or foreign affairs-financed agencies that have a political mandate, to do so. But the door should remain open. And those working under the aegis of political paymasters should not be excluded by other Europeans, but included or accepted by others on a case by case basis, provided certain conditions and principles are met. This is perhaps what EUNIC should work on: a sort of quality charter for external cultural relations.

However, the creation and development of EUNIC is perceived as the indicator of a new trend marked by increased cooperation and coordination between European cultural institutes for culture. Nonetheless, EUNIC still needs to prove it is more than the “*mere addition of individual European cultural actions*”, as **Ruth UR**²³ stated. It will have to prove that it can become a true synthesis of resources and initiatives.

One of the key challenges for EUNIC will be to develop efficient working relations with EU delegations abroad. So far, as **Rod FISCHER** stated, the EU delegations’ cultural work is still very much *ad hoc*, lacking strategic objectives, insufficiently rooted in local needs, with insufficient engagement with local sector. Many of the projects are one-off and are not conducive to sustainability, with hardly any quality assurance and inadequate budgets for cultural promotion and no systematic evaluation. As a result, national cultural institutes are often reluctant to fund EU events’ costs.

The question of the cooperation between EUNIC and the EU seems to be primary a technical one, as there does not seem to be particular objections to it. Success stories and best practices were shared in that regard: digital bridges in Turkey, or cooperation between EUNIC and the EU delegation in Senegal and Jordan. In Senegal, for cultural professionals, being supported by EUNIC has almost become a quality label. As stated by some participants, the success of EUNIC will have to be assessed against at least two criteria: the capacity of the network to benefit from co-funding by EU delegations or EU institutions, and its ability to transform individual initiatives into collective European external cultural relations adventures. As Gottfried WAGNER wrote, “*If a new external cultural policy emerges, it needs to be built on a non-bureaucratic (or low bureaucracy mode at least), non-exclusive methodology, meaning that arms’-length strategies and very strong empowerment of civil society actors both in policy development as well as in ‘delivery’ constitute the most enlightened policy experience in democratic Europe*”.

Finally, because cultural action is increasingly the product of private or non-state actors and agencies (private firms, but also NGOs, civil society networks or local authorities), one needs to reflect on the role and the added value of public structures in this context, and to see whether, how and which public and private bodies are/will be relevant in Europe’s cultural action abroad.

²³ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Head of Arts and Development of the British Council

Creative industries and cultural innovation professionals in that regard should deserve particular attention.

How can we highlight European cultural creativity and innovation?

To be innovative and creative, the European space has to be nurtured with fresh and new ideas, supported by risk-taking investments, large participation, and backed-up by policies guaranteeing freedom of expression, free enterprise and fostering international outreach. Europe's global cultural presence – not speaking of influence – depends largely on the vitality of its internal cultural dynamism. How to create mutually beneficial interactions between internal and external cultural tools?, asked **Laurence AUER**²⁴. It is essential to reflect on Europe's internal cultural cohesion while, if not before, considering its external dimensions, stated **Alain FOHR**. The ongoing crisis has widened a “North-South gap” between European societies, he said.

How to highlight the added value of cultural creativity and innovation?

The cultural sector is often perceived a secondary priority for governments and policy makers. The level of public investment and support is relatively low, and put under threat in time of crisis. However, experts have shown that cultural action does actually create jobs and contribute not only to GDP growth but more generally to human development. Is this narrative strong enough in Europe to ensure that cultural creativity and innovation will be seen as a priority by policy makers?

The need for “*comparable, reliable and comprehensive data*” on cultural action and practices remains a tremendous challenge for Europeans. As long as there is no European evidence-based knowledge on European cultural work at home and abroad, it will remain very hard for cultural experts to make the case of their added value for other segments of our societies. Hence the pledge by **David FAJOLLES**²⁵ for a deepened and broadened European network of cultural statistics to provide governments and cultural professionals with useful and comparable data. Since 2011, European statistical pilot projects can be launched on various kinds of cultural action.

Making Europe's cultures known and seen is also the work of broadcasting agencies. Today ARTE is the place showing the highest number of European cultural productions in their diversity, stressed out **André DE MARGERIE**²⁶. Thanks to its recent developments with web-based technologies, it has become a formidable tool to promote European cultures and to engage them in dialogue with other cultures in the world. As a bilateral political project between France and Germany, the channel still suffers from limitation in its diffusion and in the scope of its ambitions, and would benefit from increased cooperation with the European Union. ARTE is certainly one serious “avenue for the circulation of European imagery” on the continent and in the world.

New technologies have also benefitted from other cultural work in the field of heritage, like Europeana, an unprecedented project aiming at gathering European librarian resources. While

²⁴ Moderator for the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Secretary General Institut français

²⁵ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Head of Research & Prospective Department, French Ministry of Culture & Communication

²⁶ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, Director International Relations for ARTE France & ARTE Global

broadening the access to librarian sources, these projects have fostered increased cooperation among European libraries and cultural sectors. They also have helped creating more jobs in the sector, by developing innovative research and development projects. As an immense challenge (only 15% of archives have been digitalised so far), Europeana will probably need further partnerships and cooperations to live up to the job, as well as more pro-activeness from Member States themselves.

Apart from cultural professionals cooperating with and supported by public funding and policies, the European private sector is a much more powerful force. It invents and provides new markets with new technologies and new cultural practices. It feeds in the media and sets trends in cultural markets and cultural consumption practices. The development of the Internet and related new technologies is a field where creativity and innovation is said to be expected to grow most. To what extent are Europeans on the same page regarding Internet regulation? Do practices and policies match Europe's fundamental values of freedom of expression and citizens' equality in access to goods and services?²⁷ Ongoing debates on market access, competition, trade and state support policies, show that cultural professionals are struggling with making the case of a cultural specificity in market-led relations. European institutions and Member States will need to show some more coherence in these fields, or they may face the risk of losing large parts of Europe's cultural wealth.

Beyond culture-related multinational companies, **Malte BERGMANN**²⁸ insisted on the fact that *"the real growth in the creative industries is happening on the micro-level, increasingly with people just employed by themselves."* He explained that Europe's cultural sector is experiencing an *"atomisation process"* where middle-men are becoming more and more irrelevant. He developed the concept of *"innovation ecologies"* in urban areas, allowed by the aggregation of innovative resources on local territories, the possibility for incremental innovation, the establishment of critical masses of creativity benefiting from simultaneity (co-working) and new forms of *"post-heroic"* management. For him, innovation ecologies are already a new form of cultural exchange, innovation and wealth creation, to be exported elsewhere in the world. This is what **Pierre GINER**²⁹, an artist mixing new technology and multidisciplinary approaches, is already doing, by developing his curator's work in France, and by exporting him abroad in various formats. He emphasised opportunities offered by new technologies to create *"new imaginative spheres"* able to help us all reinvent the world we live in.

The EU has historically played a role of rule maker in global governance and brings added value to Member States by continuing doing so in the global cultural field together with other pan-European organisations such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE. This would apply to knowledge-access policies, which imply a common legal and trade strategy for contents and stabilised common positions on intellectual property rights.

What are today the appropriate tools to strengthen creativity and innovation in Europe? Will the Creative Europe agenda be enough to ensure that internal creativity will lead to the cultural

²⁷ *"The challenge lies in ensuring that future generations have a free and global digital culture"*, André LEMOS, *EUNIC Yearbook 2011*, p. 59.

²⁸ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate, sociologist & urban development researcher

²⁹ Panellist on the MORE EUROPE Paris debate



assertiveness of Europe in the world? Should governments emphasise the role of major companies competing on the global stage or focus on the support of small and medium size, locally-enrooted cultural innovators, to allow them to export their skills and experience?

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