



# CS Brief #2



## EU international cultural relations since 2016: Progress report

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The 2016 Joint Communication on EU international cultural relations has been a milestone in the history of EU external cultural action. Many reforms have taken place in the last decade<sup>1</sup>.

This Brief analyses main policy trends at play in the implementation of the Joint Communication since its publication. Firstly, the Brief looks at the effect of ongoing global transformations onto the EU international cultural relations ecosystem in the last 4 years. Secondly, it shows how policy decisions since 2016 have a) translated into the implementation of concrete new EU international cultural initiatives; b) fostered adaptive attitudes from EU policy makers; and c) encouraged policy-makers to innovate in their policy design and priorities.

### Global trends impacting the EU external cultural action ecosystem

The last four years have seen the weakening of multilateral governance structures in the fields of climate management (from COP20 to COP22), trade (regional or bilateral mega deals between trade blocs replace global agreements), culture (US withdrawal from UNESCO) and security (loosening of arms control regimes, conflicts by proxy). This has come along with the weakening of democratic practices and the rise of nationalistic and personalized political agendas in foreign affairs (China, Brazil, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United States). A new wave of competition has affected bilateral relations between major powers (see US-China relations).

The continued digitalisation of the economy has profoundly affected public organisations, media and the private sphere. Emerging technologies (i.e. artificial intelligence, human-machine relationship, generalized use of algorithms, data

protection, Internet of things, sudden growth of global digital platforms) are creating further opportunities and challenges and reshaping international affairs, leading to increased competition between major international players. As an example, the rise of China's strategic autonomy in this and other areas has left an already divided EU further isolated or absent from major global trends.

Worldwide dynamics have been impacting EU international cultural relations: the centrality of web-based platforms and digitalised contents and data is rapidly reshaping cultural affairs, markets and habits (see culture Solutions Brief #5 2019/2020 on digital change and culture). The sphere of digital entertainment has gained momentum and its increasingly wider public provides opportunity to touch on political issues (look at Obamas' deal with Netflix to produce seven films and shows).

The 2016 EU Global Strategy described an interconnected world. However, the reappearance of barriers between regional blocks or at the

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1. To compare with today's situation, see Helly D., More Cultural Europe in the World, Study for More Europe, 2012. <http://moreeurope.org/project/more-cultural-europe-in-the-world-presentation/>

entrance of global powers (such as trade tariffs or harsher migration policies) is challenging the assumption of an ever expanding globalization. Our supposedly increasingly interconnected world might have become more divided since 2016.

Furthermore, each Member State has specific geographic priorities<sup>2</sup>.

European continent's cultural cohesion is at stake, questioning cultural diversity management and the challenge of European integration. In the East of Europe, the question of cultural borders, cultural crossroads and cultural gray areas is acute (Ukrainian conflict, Caucasus).

In Neighbourhood South/Middle East, the threats of radical islam & terrorism raise questions of how to approach them as a cultural phenomenon and raise inter-culturality challenges<sup>3</sup>.

The rise of culturally influential global cultural streaming platforms displays new forms of influence and soft power. The cultural dimension of migration policies and the future of demographics (Africa/Middle East) have pushed the EU to design specific new approaches to the youth (through the Anna Lindh Foundation and other implementing organisations).

In this context, the EU doctrine of effective multilateralism that once suited an opening world is also weakened<sup>4</sup> and being replaced, in the Global Strategy, by the concept of societal resilience. However, the EU itself has entered a phase of division and confrontation with the rise of Europhobic (Brexit) and EU-sceptic forces. If "Europe, above all, is a vision of the world"<sup>5</sup>, what has been the role of international cultural relations to address above-mentioned global trends?

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The variety of European (working) cultures and persistent unanimous policy-making are now hampering EU integration. In external relations, there is almost no EU foreign policy as such. National European foreign policies have the upper hand, with Germany & France trying to play an international or regional role.

The European Commission has sketched out its main priorities for the next five years: they include a new green deal and, a renewed approach to digital challenges. Prominence will be given to anticipatory policy and investment in foresight. The new Commission will be fully aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and operate along matrix management structures. In the

SDG approach to transformative change, culture as a set of worldviews and values will play a key role. The strategic priorities of the 2020 German Presidency of the EU will be a good indicator of continuity or change in the course taken by EU foreign affairs.

## Main trends in EU international cultural relations

### Political leadership and the 2016 momentum

The 2016 Joint Communication was the result of two years of negotiations and advocacy following the 2014 finalization of the Preparatory Action on culture in external relations. This policy making process had been pushed by a coalition of institutions and people convinced

2. ERICarts Institute, Compendium on cultural policies and trends, Comparative table of European international cultural cooperation systems, based on country profiles, 19th edition, 2017, <https://www.culturalpolicies.net/themes/cultural-policy-system/tables/#1558516517013-6cebadd0-3914>

3. Anna Lindh Foundation, "Intercultural trends and social change report", 2018, 139 pages, <https://www.annalindhoundation.org/intercultural-trends-report>.

4. Youngs R., Europe Reset, IB Tauris, 2018. "The EU should replace its existing modus operandi of basing foreign policy on the supposed allure of the Union's own model of cooperation with a more flexible, participative and multi-actor model of geopolitics."

5. Statement by Michel Magnier, DG Culture and Creativity at DG EAC, 11 October 2018.

by the role of culture in European affairs<sup>6</sup>. The document benefited from an ambiguous momentum: the 2016 Global Strategy was issued the same year immediately after the Brexit referendum, which served as a wakeup call for some reinvestment in the cultural dimensions of European integration<sup>7</sup>. The 2016 Bratislava process reaffirmed the need to rethink Europe's future, the 2017 Goteborg summit<sup>8</sup> made a statement on the strengthening of European identity through education and culture.

Between 2016 and 2019, the Council issued several conclusions on EU international cultural relations.

In 2017, the Conclusions that "culture forms part of a strategic and cross-cutting approach to the Union's international relations", and emphasised the role of culture in development cooperation<sup>9</sup>. In its 2018 "Draft Conclusions on the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022", the Council recognizes culture as key to building inclusive and cohesive societies and to sustain Europe's competitiveness; it sees culture as an opportunity to deal with ongoing developments such as the digital shift, globalization, growing societal diversity and changing work environments<sup>10</sup>.

### Implementation of concrete new EU international cultural initiatives

The 2016 Joint Communication experience confirmed that high level political leadership is required to give a strong role to culture and cultural

sensitivity in foreign affairs. The political leadership that had shaped a new EU international cultural relations agenda remained strong till the end of the Juncker Commission in 2019.

Between June 2017 and June 2018, the Council set up a special "group of friends" to design a "strategic work plan or guidance" to identify where joint action would be most relevant. The group's report (prepared under the three consecutive presidencies of Malta, Estonia and Bulgaria) published in 2018 repeated the same priorities already present in previous Council conclusions and the Joint Communication. It confirmed the need to have an implementation "roadmap" that "could include progress assessment". It also added a few noticeable tasks. In particular, the report recommended some work on "the governance of the strategic approach and the respective role of the Council, the Member States, the Commission and the European External Action Service". This point reflected the fear of some Member States to see their national sovereignty bypassed by EU initiatives<sup>11</sup>. The April 2019 Council conclusions supposedly clarified the respective roles of institutions and actors in the governance of EU international cultural relations.

The report also stressed out the need to work on "coherence in interventions by Member States", "coherence among EU funding programmes and instruments" and "the role of culture in migration".

The implementation of the international cultural relations agenda since 2016 has been managed by a group of policy-makers (many of

6. HRVP Mogherini, her head of cabinet Stefano Manservigi, some member states gathered in the More Europe advocacy coalition (the UK, France, Germany, Spain to name but a few), some foundations (European Culture Foundation, Mercator), key policy makers in DG EAC, the European Parliament (Culture Committee), academics and researchers. Isar, Y.R., "Culture in EU external relations: an idea whose time has come?", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 2015, Vol. 21, No. 4, 494–508, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1042472>

7. In this process, the European Commission's DG for development cooperation (DEVCO) initially was limitedly involved under previous Commissioner Piebalgs. Yet some staff in charge of intercultural approach to development were involved in the preparation of the Joint Communication, ensuring that intercultural sensitivity would be part of the agenda. DEVCO caught up later after 2016 on the theme of "culture and development" once DEVCO Management decided to reengage with new dedicated staff.

8. European Council, "Bratislava Declaration and Roadmap", 16 September 2016, 6 pages. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21250/160916-bratislava-declaration-and-roadmapen16.pdf>.

European Commission, "Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture. The European Commission's contribution to the Leaders' meeting in Gothenburg", 17 November 2017, 14 pages. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-strengthening-european-identity-education-culture_en.pdf)

9. General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, Cultural Affairs Committee, "Draft Council Conclusions on an EU Strategic Approach to International Cultural Relations", 7935/17, 5 April 2017, 5 pages

10. European Council, "Draft Council conclusions on the Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022, 13948/18 CULT 137", 15 November 2018, 25 pages.

11. Interview with a Member State representative to the Council's education and culture preparatory working group, March 2019.

whom are Italian<sup>12</sup>) based in various EU institutions who ran a series of concrete initiatives under the umbrella of the Joint Communication's and Council conclusions' mandates.

One of these initiatives has been the international dimension of the European Year of Cultural Heritage, which was prolonged in a multi-year action plan. Another one was dedicated to the fight against the trafficking of cultural goods and terrorism financing. Policies have focused on a wide approach to culture and creative industries (European Parliament report in 2016) beyond the traditional non digitalised cultural sector. This political drive has had notable consequences in external action programming. On the diplomatic side, under the coordination of the European External Action Service, each EU Delegation appointed a cultural focal point.

EU documents now address cultural life in an encompassing anthropological perspective while recognising the specificity of the arts

## Strategic cohesion on external cultural action: a mixed record

Since 2016, the EU has been decisively bridging the gap between EU foreign policy on one side and an independent cultural sphere restricted to "the Arts" or cultural heritage on the other. All EU documents now address cultural life in an encompassing anthropological perspective while recognising the specificity of the arts and creative professionals. The Joint Communication

promotes the mainstreaming of culture in all EU external policies mentioning it in fields such as tourism, education, research, promotion of new technologies or artisanship.

The international dimension of the European Year of Cultural Heritage is a good example of European common denominator. Heritage, because it connects past, present and future, has been a smart choice of political consensus that could attract and be used by nationalists, populists and liberals at the same time. In this exercise, Lorena Aldana, heritage professional who was involved in the design and implementation of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, witnesses

that "it was really the fruit of sixteen DGs sitting together and discussing this political priority"<sup>13</sup>.

In other areas of intervention, DGs and staff are still overall lacking shared vision on what culture in external relations means. An EEAS diplomat indeed specifies that the Commission interservice group on culture includes officials from DEVCO, EAC, NEAR and the FPI but is more used for information sharing than upstream strategic policy-making purposes. Many EU Delegations staff who took part in DEVCO annual culture seminars do not know from which funding source they could finance cultural initiatives.

Cristina Farinha's experience with the Commission as an independent expert also points at limited strategic cohesion: according to her, some staff are still not grasping the cross-cutting potential of culture, beyond entertainment, in their

12. The presence of many Italian nationals in EU external cultural affairs was publicly acknowledged, with a note of humour, on 23 March 2018 at the Cultural Diplomacy Platform workshop, International Cultural Relations in practice: Workshop, 23 March 2018.

Former DEVCO Director General and HRVP Mogherini's chief of staff Stefano Manservigi, former EEAS Director for public diplomacy Silvio Gonzato, EEAS officer in charge of cultural diplomacy and cultural relations Diego Marani, former DG EAC Head of Cultural policy unit Walter Zampieri, former Chair of the European Parliament culture committee Silvia Costa, DEVCO advisor and then advisor on interreligious affairs Virginia Manzitti, DEVCO Head of sector on culture Giorgio Ficcarrelli, DG EAC Special advisor to the European Year of Cultural Heritage Ermina Sciacchitano, EEAS advisor on public and cultural diplomacy Pietro de Matteis, FPI officer in charge of the Cultural Diplomacy Platform Laura Fiore, DEVCO officer formerly in charge of intercultural approach to development Mariarosa di Nubila.

13. Interview with Lorena Aldana-Ortega, European Policy Coordinator at Europa Nostra, Brussels, 26 November 2019.

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## Culture and development in EU external action

Culture and, in, as development<sup>14</sup>

Since 2016, the European Commission's DG for development cooperation (DEVCO) has made the case for culture as a driver of profound transformation and social innovation. The role of culture has already been detailed in global and UN policy documents such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the various UNESCO conventions and reports. Under the impulsion of its former Director-General Stefano Manservigi, DEVCO injected wording on culture in the "New European Consensus for Development" and the cultural component, Treated as a "negative priority" under previous Commissioner Piebalgs, culture has from this moment on been depicted by DEVCO as central to EU development programmes<sup>15</sup>.

In practice, available data reveal a decrease in EU (EU institutions + Member states) spending for culture in aid policies (from €562 M in 2007 to around €24 M in 2019)<sup>16</sup>. However, over that same period, spending on culture by EU institutions in developing countries was increased, staying in the range of €26-34 M for

seven years in a row<sup>17</sup>. Further increase can be expected from the next phases of the ACP Culture+ and the MED Culture Programmes and from recently signed initiatives which will involve important amounts (e.g. Silk Roads project with UNESCO, Identity Building and Sharing Initiative, Transcultural, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Africa is by far the top recipient continent followed by North Africa, the Eastern Partnership and Balkans countries. However, cultural action in EU cooperation for development seems to lack a coherent strategy as pointed out by Patricio Jeretic, evaluator of the ACP Culture + Programme. Countries like Burkina Faso might receive more attention because of personal sensitivities from EU decision-makers, while others with a tremendous potential are overlooked<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, Anita Debaere directing PEARLE\* observes that the intercultural objective of the Creative Europe programme has been deepened in the neighbourhood countries through networks of cultural exchange, while with the rest of third countries, cultural relations are conducted more in a trade perspective<sup>20</sup>.

large projects. Many still see it as a niche within a restricted definition of culture<sup>21</sup>. They still work in silos with "use different languages"<sup>22</sup>.

In the 2018 "New Agenda for Culture" of the Commission it can be noted how the 2016 Joint Communication has had an impact in terms of strategic vision, as international cultural relations are the third strategic policy objective of

the Agenda. However, it could be pointed out that international cultural relations seem to be considered as a separate strand or category, lacking mainstreaming into the cultural action of the EU (as cultural heritage and digital are considered), and therefore not broadly developed in relation and synergy with the other two strategic objectives (social and economic).

14. COST project, <http://www.culturalsustainability.eu/>. Galeazzi G., Helly D., Culture in EU development policies and external action: Reframing the discussion, Maastricht, ECDPM, Briefing Note 92, 2016. <https://ecdpm.org/publications/culture-eu-development-policies-external-action/>

15. Interview with Mr. Patricio Jeretic, Consultant in Culture and Development, Interview via Skype, 9 October 2019.

16. EU aid explorer. <https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/> See also the graph in culture Solutions Brief # 3 2019/2020 on financing.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid. See culture Solutions Brief #3 2019/2020 on budgets and financing.

19. Interview with Mr. Patricio Jeretic, Consultant in Culture and Development, Interview via Skype, 9 October 2019.

20. Interview with Anita Debaere, Director of the Performing Arts Employers Associations League Europe (PEARLE\*), Interview via Skype, 14 November 2019.

21. Interview with Cristina Farinha, Independent cultural policy expert, via Skype, 25 November 2019.

22. Ibid.

What comes out of this first implementation phase since 2016 is the impression of a decentralized if not piecemeal approach, the sum of small initiatives<sup>23</sup> that, when added all together, do actually make a new policy and implementation trend. However, the scope of change envisaged in the 2016 document and following Council Conclusions appears very wide and ambitious in comparison with the actual leadership supposed to steer it.

Its effective implementation will require time, persistence, tight monitoring and regular transparent reporting. There are risks that political leadership behind the 2016 momentum will vanish. It is not clear if the networks that pushed for the external cultural agenda will remain active and how they will evolve. Debates about the conceptual and political underpinning of EU external cultural action and its connections with global climate and transformative agendas have emerged and there might be no consensus on the future priorities that the EU should pursue. In times of rapid global and technological transformation, the 2016 Joint Communication may also require some refresh to match the world and European new realities. In other words, EU strategic cohesion around international cultural relations is still work in progress.

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### “Faster than the cultural sector”: Inclusiveness in EU international cultural relations policies 2016-2019

The preparation of the 2016 Joint Communication has consisted mostly of consultations with non-European interlocutors as part of the preparatory action on culture in external relations. Although the approach was sensible, it was carried out with limited resources and with very little time (each consultation workshop lasted not more than two days at best). The preparatory action therefore provided only a snapshot of perceptions from a narrow spectrum of cultural

professionals mixed with fast document collection. As commendable process it might be, that was yet far from the deep and regular research exercise that the stakes now require. This reality led the former MEP Silvia Costa to call for instance for a proper European Observatory of EU international cultural relations.

The drafting of the Joint Communication itself did involve external stakeholders but to a limited extent. As a matter of fact, Commission officials who led the process acknowledge that “this time (they) went faster than the sector”. An impression shared by some civil society cultural networks leaders who, in 2018, were still feeling quite alien to the whole idea of EU international cultural relations.

The same coalition of actors that advocated for the Joint Communication has mainly gathered cultural institutes, foundations and parliamentarians. In a way, they did not really build a widely representative front of advocates. As a result, the first phase of implementation between 2016 and 2020 mainly consisted of national cultural institutes (usually EUNIC members) contributing quite closely to policy-making in Brussels, while civil society networks and other independent cultural actors remained more distant (and often focused on urgent intra-EU priorities).

### Policy adaptation and innovation since 2016

Policy innovation here is understood as i) defining new objectives and new courses of action to match moving targets; ii) reorient the course of action to a different level, location or with different partners; or iii) test, invent, experiment new policy initiatives.

Since the adoption of the 2016 Joint Communication and as part of it, a number of innovative attitudes and initiatives have been taken by policy makers.

23. culture Solutions Brief #3 2019/2020 on financing estimates that since 2016, around €250 million have been committed to new international cultural initiatives. Interview with Camille de Toledo, by phone, 27 November 2019. The author considers that the existing “logic of small and shy initiatives” on culture should be replaced by a “cultural electroshock”.

In policy terms, the Joint Communication has been complemented by several documents published by other institutions: Council conclusions (2017 and 2019), the regulation on fight against trafficking of cultural goods, a Council presidency work plan on culture, the European consensus on development, the New Agenda for Culture, the Action plan on cultural heritage. In a way, these documents deepen the niche already carved by the Joint Communication.

Reorientation of action on different levels and locations or with different partners has also happened to some extent: the European Commission launched new partnerships on culture with UNESCO and other UN agencies (UNIDO) as well as with some Member States' implementing agencies (Camoës, Goethe Institut, EUNIC Global). The Foreign Policy Instrument started the Cultural Diplomacy Platform (designed before the adoption of the Joint Communication).

Experiments took place at various levels: EU Delegations shared information with the EEAS to

be posted on the EEAS website, new approaches have been tested in the Balkans, consultation seminars held with EUNIC in the framework of the Joint EUNIC-EEAS-EC guidelines<sup>24</sup>. Creative Europe

commissioned i-portunus, a pilot programme on innovative mobility<sup>25</sup>. DG Research and innovation also launched ILUCIDARE, a new Horizon 2020 programme on heritage diplomacy.

DEVCO, with the lion's share of cultural budgets, invested heavily in experiments: It launched a new web-based exchange platform (a cultural

LinkedIn according to some EU official<sup>26</sup>) in 2019 and several innovative programmes (ethical fashion initiative, Creatifi – on innovative financing). A religious relations platform was in preparation at the end of 2019.

For Gottfried Wagner, the EU however missed several opportunities to invest more in culture in the last few years. He gives the example of the “opening of Iran-EU negotiations when the appetite for intercultural dialogue among the countries civil society was not echoed by the institutions”<sup>27</sup>.

**Since 2016 EUNIC members have contributed closely to international cultural relations policy-making, while civil society networks remained more distant**

### Examples of EU international cultural relations innovations 2016-2019

- > Religious relations platform
- > Ethical Fashion initiative
- > ILUCIDARE
- > i-portunus
- > Creatifi
- > Culture X-Change platform
- > Global cultural leadership training and alumni network
- > Eu alumni engagement initiative

24. European Commission, Joint Guidelines: EUNIC - EEAS - EC Partnership, Brussels, June 2019 (first edition), 20 pages.

25. <https://www.i-portunus.eu/wp-fuut/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/OS-final.pdf>.

26. European Commission-DG DEVCO, Statements made during the 2019 DEVCO annual seminar on culture, Brussels, October 2019.

27. Interview with Gottfried Wagner, Freelance Cultural Consultant for public and civil cultural organisations, via telephone, 12 November 2019.

## Conclusion: will culture stay on the EU international agenda?

In 2018 DG EAC Director Michel Magnier finished one of his speeches by stating that “culture is back on the European agenda”. Our research certainly can confirm this for the 2016-2019 period.

There has been some sort of strategic cohesion (despite a variety of views and priorities) in the EU and some consensus on culture as creation of value and relevance in today’s world.

In this regard, the 2016 Joint Communication on international cultural relations has helped concentrate the focus and has become a reference point for policies.

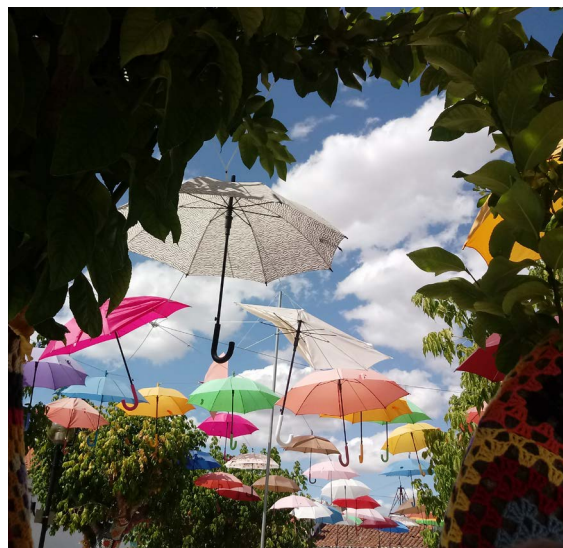
The principle of culture mainstreaming in EU’s external action and multilateral engagement is now acknowledged and encouraged by the EU leadership. Yet, much more action will be required to “pull culture away from the far corners of the international relations policy map towards the centre”<sup>28</sup>.

Cultural mainstreaming is a core principle for the “integration of European societies”<sup>29</sup> and for Patricio Jeretic, it should be applied in “all external relations with our partners”<sup>30</sup>. An EEAS official dealing with EU-Africa relations considers that culture is a leverage in EU’s relations with Africa to promote societal models. Bilateral post-colonial relations with Europeans are being replaced by multilateral relations wherein various social models promoted by Africa’s external partners are competing<sup>31</sup>.

**The teams leading EU institutions from 2019 onwards are inheriting a growing external cultural agenda.**

The teams leading EU institutions from 2019 onwards are inheriting a growing external cultural agenda. While culture seems to be mainstreamed in various Commission’s portfolios<sup>32</sup>, the international cultural relations agenda still has to be fully unfolded and combined with the new Commission and Parliament’s priorities. For instance, the connections between international cultural relations and the Green Deal (see culture Solutions Brief #6 2019/2020 on international cultural relations and climate change), the digital agenda and the promotion of a European way of life need to be explored and unpacked<sup>33</sup>.

In a rapidly transforming global environment where digital power sharing and climate justice will increasingly matter, the EU will soon have to refresh and update the Joint Communication and its policy toolbox on a strategic approach to international cultural relations.



28. Sacco P., Professor of Cultural Economics IULM University Milan, Italy quoted in “Manifesto Culture4future”, op. cit.

29. Interview with a high level Polish cultural diplomat, Warsaw, 27 November 2019.

30. Interview with Patricio Jeretic, Consultant in Culture and Development, Interview via Skype, 9 October 2019.

31. Interview with an EEAS Advisor, Brussels, 12 November 2019.

32. KEA, “Culture: nowhere or everywhere?”: 23 September 2019, <https://keanet.eu/culture-nowhere-or-everywhere/>.

33. European Commission, A Union that strives for more, My agenda for Europe, by candidates for President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen, Six priorities for 2019-2024, European Commission, 16 July 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_en).



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