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EU Cultural Policy between Community-building and Market-making: putting the EU's Cultural Agenda into Historical Perspective

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No reference to a specific EU competence in the cultural sector appeared in the Rome Treaty. The latter simply pointed to the need to 'lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe'. By 1992, Article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty (now Article 151) created a formal competence for EU intervention in the cultural field. Much ahead of the Maastricht Treaty reform, EU-level actions in the field of cultural policy had however been adopted at the Community level. In the absence of any Treaty competence, justifying EU intervention in the cultural sector was a tricky endeavour. The setback in fact persisted even after the introduction of a Community competence. The Maastricht approach indeed aimed to provide safeguards for national autonomy, which is ensured, essentially, with the principle of subsidiarity. The harmonisation of member states' legal and regulatory provisions was clearly excluded from the scope of Article 151. In fact, the Directorate-General for Culture, Youth and Education ('DG Culture') of the European Commission has always benefited from a narrow remit and a marginal share of the EU budget. The question arises, of where culture stands in the process of European Community construction. Will it eventually assert itself as an autonomous and supranationalized sector of EU policy-making? At the heart of this question lies the broader, more crucial debate, of the nature of European integration, between market-making, and community-building.

When culture was meant to serve Europe

In 1969, the French government initiated the Hague Summit, during which European Heads of the State acknowledged that the construction of an ever tighter European peoples' union was indispensable for preserving an exceptional seat of development, of progress and culture, for world equilibrium and for peace. Thus, developing EU cultural actions was first presented as a political imperative. In the 1970s, Member States began to realise that if the European Union was to succeed as an entity, the feeling of belonging to a common culture had to be fostered. Repeatedly, states' declarations in support of EU cultural cooperation highlighted the concern not to confine integration to the sphere of economics. At the Copenhagen Summit of October 1973, Heads of the State adopted the *Declaration on European Identity*, in which they concluded that special attention had to be given to intangible values, underlining the position of Europe as an ideal place for the development of culture, and the role of culture as one of the fundamental elements of European identity. The two 1985 *Adonnino Reports on*



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a *People's Europe*, produced by the *ad hoc* Committee on a People's Europe, contained specific sections devoted to culture and communication. The first report suggested the creation of support schemes in the audiovisual sector, the establishment of a European Academy of Science, Technology and Art and measures meant to ensure young people's access to museums and cultural events. The proposals put forward in the second report concentrated on the image and identity of the Community, and suggested the introduction of concrete 'European' symbols to which citizens could relate. More specifically, the report proposed adopting a European Flag and a European anthem. The notion of a People's Europe was a fairly well-established one within the European Community of the late 1980s. At its core was the idea that the integration project should not be primarily concerned with market-making, but also with a more 'fundamental' project of community building. Thus, the promoting of cultural policies at the EU level was presented as part of a broader project, the objective of which was to foster a sense of European identity amongst Community citizens. 'Symbolic' initiatives aiming at reinforcing the feeling of European identity among European states, such as the 'European City of Culture' and the 'European Cultural Month', were also initiated in the 1980s.

Before Europe could serve culture?

In 1974, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on cultural matters, which represented a giant step towards the formulation of a 'would-be EU cultural policy'. The Parliament proposed, in particular, to eliminate the administrative obstacles which still hamper the exchange of cultural works and cultural workers and approximate the national laws on the protection of cultural heritage and intellectual property-rights. These proposals seemed to herald the *economic* focus of EU action in the cultural sector. The European Commission first intervened in the cultural sector in 1977, with the *Communication on Community Action in the Cultural Sector* which set out, essentially, to ensure free trade in the cultural sector. In the 1982 *Communication on Stronger Community Action in the Cultural Sector*, the Commission confined itself again to considering the *economic* aspects of the cultural sector. Only a limited number of actions, such as proposals for support programmes in the film sector or schemes for the preservation of cultural heritage, could be characterised as genuine attempts to initiate EU cultural policies.

Since 1987 however, Community action in the cultural sector has however become more structured, with regular meetings of the Culture Council, and the establishment of a Committee for Cultural Affairs in 1988. In the 1987 Communication entitled *A Fresh Boost for Culture in the European Community*, the Commission argued that the time had come to give cultural activities in the Community a higher profile. After a hesitant awakening, the gradual unfolding of EU intervention in the cultural sector proved that new policies could be gradually constructed and institutionalised in the absence of formal treaty basis. Yet the rationale that was devised by European institutions in



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order to justify the reinforcement of EU intervention brings to light the difficulties met by supranational structures in justifying their involvement in a policy area that was not covered by the Rome Treaty.

Article 128 of the Maastricht Treaty (now Article 151), which established a legal basis for EU cultural policy, states that Community action should be aimed at encouraging cooperation between member states and supporting and supplementing their action in the fields of cultural heritage, non-commercial cultural exchanges and artistic and literary creation, including in the audiovisual sector. In the wake of the Maastricht Treaty reform, support programmes were created in the 1990s in the fields of cultural heritage, books and reading and living arts. They have been replaced by a single and more coherent support scheme, the Culture Programme, in 2000. The Media Programme, designed to make the European audiovisual industry more competitive, was also endorsed in 1990. From the late 1980s onwards, EU Directives were also passed in the fields of broadcasting and intellectual property law. However, such regulation fell under the remit of the Internal Market Council. Despite the introduction of a treaty basis on culture and the increasing involvement of Member States in projects of EU cultural cooperation, there is still no comprehensive and positive 'European cultural policy'. Rather, EU intervention in the cultural sector is a mixture of *dirigiste* support schemes, symbolic initiatives and attempts to harmonise EU law in the perspective of the Single Market. DG Culture has been responsible, essentially, for the Culture Programme as well as several symbolic initiatives, such as the 'City of Culture' event, for instance.

Culture serving Europe again, but which Europe?

It is in this context that DG Culture, within the European Commission, has made the political decision of promoting an Agenda for Culture in which the role of culture, as an instrument of social cohesion, foreign relations, and economic competitiveness, is emphasised. If culture as such could not gain sufficient attention at European level, the significance of culture for the fulfilment of broader policy objectives had to be brought to light. In the 2007 Communication *A European Agenda for Culture in a Globalized World*, the European Commission presents the first long term strategy for cultural policy at EU level. To begin with, the Commission recalls that the flowering of the cultures of the Member States in respect of their national and regional diversity is an important EU objective assigned by the EC Treaty. The Commission brings to the fore its long-existing discourse on 'unity and diversity', by explaining that in order to simultaneously bring our common heritage to the fore and recognise the contribution of all cultures present in our societies, cultural diversity needs to be nurtured in a context of exchanges between different cultures. Second, culture is presented as a direct source of creativity, and creativity itself is defined in terms of its potential for social and technological innovation, and thus as an important driver of growth, competitiveness and jobs. The objective, here, consists in making



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culture one of the key axis of the so-called Lisbon Strategy. In March 2000, EU governments agreed to strive to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy in the world by 2010, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. The 'knowledge-based economy' is the watchword of Lisbon and the basic conceptual lens through which the future model of development for the EU is conceived. Whereas education, for instance, had already made its way into the Lisbon strategy, culture was still considered a laggard. Thus, entering the Lisbon strategy was clearly the objective for DG Culture. Finally, culture is presented as a vital element in the Union's international relations. The Commission proposes to promote the systematic integration of the cultural dimension in all external and development policies, projects and programmes, as a means of strengthening the quality of its diplomatic efforts, and the viability and sustainability of all EU cooperation activities. The emphasis is clearly laid on the instrumental potential of culture as a means of fostering the EU's external relations and European competitiveness. Even intercultural dialogue is in fact presented as essential in the context of the global economy with regard to enhancing the employability and mobility of workers in the cultural sector.

The new agenda has now obtained recognition at the highest political level. Commission President José Manuel Barroso explained at the press conference on the European Manifesto for Creativity and Innovation and on EU 2020 in November 2009, that '[O]ne of the important messages of this manifesto and the work of our ambassadors is the need to put together creativity and innovation. To link participants from science to art and culture. We need to put innovation and creativity at the heart of tomorrow's policies'. In 2007, the Education, Youth and Culture Council has issued its *Conclusions on the contribution of the cultural and creative sectors to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives*, in which the discourse developed by the Commission is fully endorsed. A few months later, head of governments within the European Council acknowledged the potential of the 'cultural and creative industries' as contributing to the aims of the Lisbon Agenda, giving culture full horizontal recognition at intergovernmental level. In March 2008, the European Council also mentioned that the potential for innovation and creativity of European citizens, built on 'European culture and excellence in science' is a key factor for future growth. Thus, the Commission, and more specifically DG Culture, have been successful in imposing a new discourse, in which culture is seen as a solution to broader economic challenges, on top of the intergovernmental agenda.

DG Culture clearly saw its institutional interest in promoting an instrumental role for culture. Simply put, asserting the crucial role of culture in terms of fulfilling broader economic objectives was perceived as a way of attracting financial resources and strengthening its institutional remit. In its 2007 Communication, the Commission lays the emphasis on the aim of developing creative partnerships between the cultural sector and other sectors with a view to reinforcing the social and economic impact of



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investments in culture and creativity. The new agenda is thus instrumental to re-directing existing resources. Moreover, the competences of DG Culture have always been 'thin', its services being mainly responsible for the Culture Support Programme, and relations between the Education and Culture units within the DG itself being sparse. The cultural policy case demonstrates that rhetoric of an economic nature, referring to free exchange or competitiveness arguments, more often makes it way in the EU policy process. In the same way, debates on EU education policy have shifted away from questions of provision of national public goods towards one concerning competition within and beyond the European single market. In the field of social policy, EU intervention has eroded member states' sovereignty over their social policy regimes in the interest of labour mobility. Given the market-making nature of European integration and the centrality of the Lisbon Strategy in current EU level policy debates on the future of the EU, economic arguments are a quasi must-be, when DGs of the European Commission aim to give a higher profile to formerly marginalised policy issues.

Thus, the success of DG Culture in obtaining horizontal recognition of its new agenda is double-egged. It could propagate its policy agenda very successfully, but the discourse was also framed within the contours allowed by the political and institutional context in which it operates. It could, in fact, give a higher profile to culture, but not in its own terms.

Suggested Readings

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