



Culture and Conflict in EU External Relations: The Case of Ukraine

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Concept Note

I. INTRODUCTION: CHANGING THE LENS ON CONFLICT FOR COMPREHENSIVE ACTION

The proliferation of conflicts and humanitarian crises has brought the risk of large-scale regional violence and instability ever closer. Climate impacts, competition for resources, and rising inequality are becoming a threat multiplier that cuts across national and international policy agendas. Already-marginalized sectors of society will be hit the hardest, as usual, and may become a target for populism.

At the same time, shifts are also occurring in attitudes to power, compounded by technological change. There is a crisis of faith in the ability of governments, (multilateral) institutions and ‘elites’ to act collectively, rapidly and effectively. The blurring of boundaries between individuals and organizations has global repercussions for international relations. How will leaders react to the enhanced ability of citizens to influence change at the highest level in unpredictable ways? And how will we deal with ‘culturalisation’ of conflicts, with fundamentalism and ideological instrumentalisation?

Against this backdrop, fresh approaches to external relations can provide traction – beyond military intervention, socio-economic fixes and conventional diplomacy – for crisis prevention, mitigation and longer-term initiatives for peace and stability. Because ‘cultural’ differences so often lie at the root of conflict, and/or are mistaken as root-causes, cultural strategies need to be an integral part of more innovative and adequate responses.

While links between the culture and peacebuilding sectors are still tenuous, interest is growing fast among public sector institutions, including foreign and defence ministries and diplomatic corps. New actors are entering the field, with private innovators helping to create cultural capital in conflict-affected communities. Harnessing this creative momentum can help shift the mindset of international relations for the 21st century and pave the way for new narratives, in particular European.

The key question is “how” cultural components can progressively be incorporated into EU external relations. This workshop is designed to help participants develop practical guidelines for future EEAS/FPI programming. Expertise on Ukraine can enhance insight, and even help shape the short-term component of the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). The next section provides substantive insights, followed by framing questions to stimulate discussion leading to concrete recommendations.

II. PRACTICE INSIGHTS FROM SALZBURG GLOBAL SEMINAR: HOW CULTURE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The points below are informed by programs and networks facilitated by Salzburg Global Seminar over nearly seven decades of strategic convening on arts and culture, civil society development, education, law and international relations. **Cultural innovators, whose work is rooted in collaboration, often have deep understanding of the value and opportunities in place and space. Even in fragile or failing societies, they find ways to empower and transform streets, neighbourhoods, and even cities by skilful design. This ability to survive and thrive holds critical lessons for inclusion and resilience.**

Cultural strategies for conflict settings may be designed within a time/space matrix, with the war or violence at the nexus. Research¹ and practice shared at the 2014 launch of Salzburg Global's *Conflict Transformation through Culture* series can provide useful indicators for policymakers:

- In ongoing conflicts, cultural activists need support to sustain a sense of dialogue and critical reflection in favour of humanity.
- As the conflict gets further away spatially and/or temporally, different motivations and interests will shape approaches chosen by different groups (diaspora, next generation in the original place of conflict etc.). **Understanding different concepts of home, identity, belonging, entitlement and rights is critical to inform and strengthen perspectives on resilient and lasting civilian 'solutions'.**
- Longer-term reconciliation strategies may focus on 'remembrance' and shared (e.g. European) frameworks of 'commemoration' that allow for respect for diversity.
- The arts offer alternative disturbing and healing ways to understand how pivotal moments in the past have deeply affected the present, while creatively appreciating the historical gravitas of conflict. Communities ravaged by war not only face the immediate loss of physical, historical and cultural reference points but also long-term dislocations between generations, classes and possibly races.
- Cultural strategies carry risks that need to be pre-identified. Justice and reconciliation are not necessarily aligned or synonymous. Efforts to achieve a sense of justice for one community can undermine reconciliation with another. Well-meant initiatives developed without proper on-the-ground dialogue can fail the communities they try to serve by foisting one or other approach upon them or hindering the development of anything workable.
- Culture is often at the root of conflict, or is perceived as the root, and keeps it alive. Recognizing this from the start can help identify innovative ways to bring communities together and let them talk about defining issues. For post-conflict strategies, culture should not be a bolt-on to diplomacy but a complementary parallel avenue to help people who have lived through trauma to be part of an organic process of local, national and international development.
- Enabling human creativity in dangerous situations is challenging, but at their best, civil society and cultural engagement can radically alter perceptions of the 'other' in order to generate perspectives beyond traditional patterns.
- Education and media literacy are key components of this kind of holistic framework.
- Lastly, an inter-generational lens is fundamental for successful interventions. In many settings, youth coming of age have grown up with the legacy of conflict (e.g. the UNHCR indicates that average displacement for refugees is 17 years (the entire school education

¹ James Thompson, Lead Researcher, *In Place of War*; Professor of Applied and Social Theater, University of Manchester, UK.

span). This can lead to a sense of uselessness, confusion and resentment, increasing the risk of a further cycle of conflict unless positive rebuilding strategies are implemented.

Examples of how culture can be a game changer in very different conflict situations include:

- The transformation of a Syrian refugee camp into an urban incubator, which humanitarian agencies help to grow organically in ways compatible with the host countries' long-term needs and a greater sense of ownership and dignity for refugees.²
- Cultural heritage projects aligned with genocide anniversaries (Turkey/Armenia centenary; twinned project between Rwanda (20th) and Cambodia (40th), initiated by Cambodia Living Arts in connection with Salzburg Global's Holocaust Education and Genocide Prevention series, generating a south-south exchange of cultural innovators and educators).
- Film initiatives in contexts affected by racial, religious and political divides (e.g. *Pakistan Calling*, *Truth in Translation* (from South Africa) and many Northern Ireland projects).

Such examples, and the Ukrainian insights³ to be shared at the Workshop, show how innovative approaches engaging the cultural sector could directly support EEAS as a powerful force for peacebuilding, reconciliation, and social progress, as well as economic development and regional cohesion. To realize this potential, however, there is a need to rethink and expand support for exchange programs and capacity building at all levels (artist residencies, journalist exchanges, educational exchange, training cultural managers, multi-lingualism/translation programs, and entrepreneurship skills training).

III. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS: THE EU-COMMISSIONED 'PREPARATORY ACTION ON CULTURE IN EXTERNAL RELATIONS'⁴

In 2013-2014, MORE EUROPE implemented the Preparatory Action on "Culture in the EU's External Relations", which was launched by the European Parliament in order to facilitate and support the process of research, exchange about the role of culture in the EU's external relations. It covered 54 countries of which 26 were third countries, including Russia and Ukraine. It draws conclusions and recommendations for a strategic approach to mobilising the potential of culture in EU external relations.

First and foremost, the Preparatory Action revealed that there is great demand, in Europe and elsewhere, for more and better European cultural relations with the rest of the world, provided that Europeans change their approach from projecting their individual national cultures to listening, sharing, imagining and creating together with their partners.

The final report provides recommendation and ideas of pilot projects to achieve and create a European strategic approach to international cultural relations in many fields of the external

² http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/05/world/middleeast/zaatari-refugee-camp-in-jordan-evolves-as-a-do-it-yourself-city.html?_r=0

³ See also the paper by Olga Burlyuk

⁴ Preparatory Action Culture in EU External Relations <http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu/>

action. These include culture in conflict prevention and resolution, but also approaches related to human, social and economic development, the importance of cultural and creative industries in the external trade of the EU, etc.

The main recommendations on the role of culture in conflict and crisis management, endorsed by EU institutions and ‘consulted cultural operators’, are the following:

- A strong call to reinforce the role of culture in conflict prevention and conflict resolution in the context of crisis and emergencies, as well as in human, social and economic development. Indeed, positive results have been achieved through the deployment of cultural expression as a tool of conflict prevention and/or resolution, in bringing succour to the victims of conflict-driven emergencies (e.g. refugees), or in supporting efforts at post-conflict reconstruction as , for instance, in South East Europe and other regions.
- On a more concrete and urgent level, it is recommended to integrate policies to prevent and respond to the wilful destruction of cultural heritage in times of war or violent conflict into the EU’s agenda for the prevention and management of conflicts. For this purpose, EU governments should for instance make sure that EU crisis management missions include heritage protection as part of their mandate and that EU peace keepers receive appropriate information and training about their obligations under international law.
- The consultation made in Ukraine shows also that “dialogue” is needed as a process of restoring trust, mutual respect and understanding, leading to a development of a new social contract within societies and with their neighbour countries.
- Local communities and youth are mentioned as the main level of a meaningful and long term engagement where culture projects are bottom-up driven, peer-to-peer and reach to other communities and engage peripheries.
- Interdisciplinary culture projects and ideas appear to be more effective in complex situations as well as to attract and reach out to larger audiences.
- The EU and European Member States need to provide more support for the independent cultural sector through exchanges, pilot reform projects, less restrictive visa procedures, and cultural management training.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on the need for the EU to support structures in order to reform practices, develop culture policies and enhance “dialogue”.

IV. WAYS FORWARD: FRAMING QUESTIONS TO GUIDE EEAS/FPI PROGRAMMING

The points below are intended to facilitate open conversations between participants from different perspectives to help them (1) define the most promising avenues with particular application to Ukraine; and (2) develop concrete recommendations specific to the EU (and the EEAS) regarding programming capacity for conflict prevention and transformation.

General discussion points:

- What steps could facilitate dialogue at EU and Member State levels between actors engaged in peace-building and conflict prevention efforts, to encourage development and

implementation of culture, media and technology strategies for conflict and post-conflict agendas?

- How can we strengthen networking between key actors in specific (and cultural) contexts, to interconnect peacebuilding efforts and learn from those closest to the ground?
- How can a body of evidence around successful cultural strategies become incorporated in future peacebuilding and reconciliation policies?

Drawing on the case studies from the Ukraine and the work presented in Olga Burlyuk's paper, critical questions that may be discussed include:

- **Success Models** of arts-based and intercultural projects: what has emerged from action is transferrable to other conflict contexts?
- **The Art of Dialogue:** Arts can help bring about differentiation amidst politically marked debates, earn trust, encourage empathy, create awareness and inspire tolerance around difference. How can we maximize this positive potential to weave arts-based dialogue strategies into the mainstream policy matrix (also for specific conflict zones)?
- **Pre- and Post-Conflict Human Empowerment:** The therapeutic and healing potential of the arts is vast. How can we enable the arts to provide more alternatives to diffuse frustration, aggression, and hostility, and to help in the treatment and healing of trauma for victims?
- **Capacity Building:** How could local, regional and national institutions learn to implement conflict transformation strategies?
- **Managing Projections:** What kind of projections do external actors have (e.g., in the case of Ukraine, the EU, wider Europe, the US and Russia) and apply in a regional context, and with what impact? How does this vertical/external narrative affect (e.g.) Ukraine, her culture and history and her freedom to exist with multiple and changing identities?
- **Managing Collective Imagination (and being specific):** What kind of 'societal psyche' has developed in conflict areas, e.g. in Ukraine in relation with Russia, notably with regard to the issue of language and culture? And, in order to be specific, does Ukraine have a special position/status compared for example to other ex-Soviet countries, some of which are now EU Member States?