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NOTE

from :	Presidency
to	Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1) / Council
Subject:	Use of culture as a soft policy option in EU external relations - <i>Policy debate</i> (Public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency])

Following consultation of the Cultural Affairs Committee, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate on the above subject at the EYCS Council meeting on 16-17 May 2013.

Use of culture as a soft policy option in eu external relations

Culture in external relations is one of the key priorities of the 2011 – 2014 Council Work Plan for Culture¹, in line with the European Agenda for Culture², which identified the promotion of culture as a vital element in the Union's international relations (strategic objective 3). Both for its intrinsic value and as a specific sector of economic activity, culture has a clear contribution to make to the development of economic and political relations with third countries, people to people contacts and mutual understanding.

Developing a strategic approach to culture in external relations is not only about culture, but also about the wider political, economic and diplomatic context. It is linked with trade relations and the circulation of EU cultural goods and services, as well as with public diplomacy and image building. Culture and creativity is considered an area of 'comparative advantage' for Europe. There is a need to maximise the contribution of this advantage to external relations against the backdrop of a fast changing global economy and world.

Culture is a key component of what is often called “soft power” i.e. the use of cooperation and cultural contacts as instruments of foreign (external) policy. Cultural cooperation is an important vehicle for the EU to share universal values to which the EU attaches utmost importance.

While other forms of cultural cooperation exist, such as support through EU programmes, currently cultural cooperation with third countries is carried out primarily at the level of the EU Member States. This is often focussed on neighbouring countries and countries with which Member States have historic, economic or strategic links and bilateral activities are undertaken with a view to strengthening these ties. These often provide concrete forms of cooperation for national organisations, artists and cultural enterprises. These activities are delivered usually via Member States' embassies or consulates, cultural institutes, and directly via organisations coming from public and private sectors (museums, theatres, orchestras, cultural industries, etc.).

¹ OJ C 325, 2.12.2010, p.1.

² COM(2010) 390 final.

While bilateral activities between Member States and third countries are and will remain fundamental, it is worthwhile seeking to establish whether a concerted EU action in this area could bring some added value. Delivering such added value at EU level could be a shared responsibility of all actors concerned, mainly Member States, EU institutions such as the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Commission, and civil society. Acting together at the EU level could be beneficial in pooling individual initiatives, ensuring synergies and coherence of individual actions, strengthening information sharing and networking, as well as achieving economies of scale.

In the framework of the Work Plan for Culture, the Presidencies of the Council were invited to organise, jointly with the Commission, "when appropriate a joint informal meeting between senior officials of Ministries of Culture and senior officials responsible for culture in Ministries of Foreign Affairs, with a view to developing a strategic approach to culture in external relations and enhancing cooperation in this field". Such meetings were held under the Presidencies of Hungary, Poland and Denmark.

Within this framework, the European Commission was also invited to convene expert groups on the promotion of cultural relations with third countries to "feed into work on a specific issue and to facilitate the definition of strategies regarding the cultural relations with third countries". An expert group of Member States' representatives from Ministries of Culture and Ministries of Foreign Affairs was set up in March 2012 to reflect on a strategy regarding cultural relations between the EU and China as a test case. The expert group was co-chaired by the Commission and the EEAS. While focusing on China, the work of the expert group was also to contribute to the development of a more general EU strategy on culture and external relations.

The expert group reported in November 2012 and identified a set of guiding principles and general recommendations for a strategic approach to culture in the case of the EU-China relations (see Appendix Attached). These general principles and recommendations may also provide the basis for future strategies regarding the EU cultural relations with third countries and further initiatives in this area.

The main purpose of the debate is to develop a consensus around the nature of the EU's role in developing cultural cooperation with third countries and to discuss the contribution that the use of some or all of the expert group's recommendations can make to the further development of a strategic approach to the role of culture in the EU relations with third countries.

The Ministers are invited to address the following questions:

- 1. To what extent can the general principles outlined in the expert group's report add value to the current broadly independent approach pursued by Member States and constitute the basis for the development of a more strategic EU approach to cultural relations with third countries, given the global economic, technological and political shifts that are occurring?**
- 2. What specific elements of the recommendations relating to EU-China cultural relations should be acted upon in the short term?**

MINISTERIAL DEBATE - Immediate and practical responses

Ministers will be encouraged to contribute to the debate without scripted interventions, if they so wish, so as to stimulate interactive debate. To ensure that all Ministers have an opportunity to input into the debate, ideally more than once, it is recommended that inputs are brief (not exceeding two minutes) and succinct.

General and specific recommendations of the expert group's report

I. General recommendations for a strategic approach to culture in EU-China relations

In order to develop a strategic approach to culture in EU-China relations, the expert group recommends:

1) To consider the following guiding principles:

- a. To anchor cultural cooperation on the principles of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.
- b. To adopt a broad, articulated vision of culture in the context of EU external action considered in all its facets as a social, economic and political asset for the EU and its Member States.
- c. To share universal values to which the EU attaches utmost importance, such as freedom of expression, free and equal access to information, which are essential for creativity to flourish, through concrete action and cooperation.
- d. To respect the autonomy of the cultural sector and prioritize bottom-up processes.
- e. To make full use of the potential of culture as a generator of dialogue and mutual understanding, a vehicle for sharing values and promoting interests, and a prime source for developing trust and encouraging cross-fertilization between societies.
- f. To engage in long-term, two-way processes aimed at building trust over time and seeking mutual understanding and benefits with China.
- g. To adopt a multi-level approach considering the broader regional context in Asia and addressing different levels of governance within China (local, regional, non-governmental actors).
- h. To develop inclusive processes building on existing expertise and structures both within the EU and Member States and in China and using them more strategically.

- i. To pay special attention to the young generation as a key target group and identify the most effective means of communication and outreach, including the internet and social media.

2) To integrate culture as part of EU policy towards China more systematically and strategically.

To reach this goal, the EU and Member States should:

- a. Develop closer cooperation and more integrated working modalities between relevant Ministries and departments in charge of culture and foreign policies.
- b. Integrate culture as a 'soft power asset' in the context of public diplomacy and outreach strategies more effectively.
- c. Ensure the articulation of cultural diplomacy and cooperation on the one hand and other relevant policies and priorities of external relations on the other (such as sustainable development, urbanisation, human rights, trade and IPR issues, rule of law, security).
- d. Include more systematically cultural and societal aspects into their country analysis.

3) To support bottom-up approaches as well as direct and sustainable cooperation among cultural professionals and organisations from the EU and China through training, mobility, networking and concrete support to project development.

4) To build the capacity and improve the competitiveness of European cultural and creative sectors.

- 5) To explore adequate and diversified resources both at the EU and Member States' level as well as seek effective partnerships in China.**

More specifically:

- a. To ensure support for actions aimed at a strategic approach to culture in EU external relations in the future EU instruments in the fields of culture and external relations;
- b. To design innovative approaches for Member States to share tasks and pool resources to achieve greater economies of scale and to leverage their efforts at EU level;
- c. To attract private funding and involve private cultural stakeholders, such as businesses and foundations.

The expert group recommends that these general recommendations and guiding principles shall be considered when developing a strategic approach to culture in the EU's relations with other third countries/regions.

II. Specific recommendations for the implementation of a strategic approach to culture in EU-China relations

Based on the general recommendations and guiding principles, in order to implement a strategic approach to culture in EU-China relations, the expert group recommends:

- 1) To project a more coherent image of the EU in China through a better integration of culture in public diplomacy strategies and a more strategic use of the potential of virtual tools to facilitate not only showcasing and branding but also concrete forms of cultural cooperation.**
- 2) To undertake a more systematic and structured collection of information on a sector-specific basis about the opportunities and challenges of engaging in EU-China cultural cooperation.**

- 3) **To strengthen interactions among the EU cultural stakeholders present in China through an expanded network** bringing together Member States' representatives competent for culture, cultural institutes, including the EUNIC China Cluster, as well as major cultural organisations, foundations and private networks as appropriate.
- 4) **To task a dedicated cultural focal point in the EU Delegation in Beijing with working closely with Member States** in order to facilitate stakeholders' cooperation, gathering and sharing of information as well as joint approaches vis-à-vis the Chinese authorities on issues of common interest for Member States.

III. The way forward: towards a concrete step change in EU-China cultural relations

In order to move towards a concrete step change in EU-China cultural relations, the expert group recommends:

- 1) **To promptly launch a pilot phase in 2013** in order to:
 - a. **Task a dedicated cultural focal point in the EU Delegation in Beijing with working closely with Member States;**
 - b. **Establish an expanded network of relevant EU cultural stakeholders in Europe and in China and facilitate interactions and information sharing;**
 - c. **Launch a series of sector-specific mapping and research,** with a view to:
 - i. gathering information on the state of play in selected sectors of cooperation between the EU and China,
 - ii. making proposals on how to best derive EU added value in the selected sectors,
 - iii. analysing the feasibility of proposed actions.

d. Priorities for the pilot phase shall take into account the areas of mutual interest analysed in section 3 of the report "Areas of mutual interest for the EU and China".

- 2) To identify concrete priorities, actions and resources for the medium to long-term, based on the results of the pilot phase.**
 - 3) To assess the results of implemented actions on a regular basis with a possible mid-term evaluation of the proposed strategy (by 2017).**
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