



A new beginning for Europe – the EUNIC network

Culture and cultural policy is of strategic importance for Europe's relations with the rest of the world. Until now there has been a lack of a common, coordinated EU strategy for the role of culture in the continent's external relations. For more than a century, individual countries have been running their own organisations for cultural diplomacy. The establishment of an umbrella organisation for European cultural institutes (EUNIC) in 2006 heralded a new beginning for Europe's international cultural diplomacy and external relations. Just the fact that EUNIC's member organisations have 2000 representations around the world offers huge potential for European external cultural action. How can EUNIC help to develop a common policy for external European cultural relations?

Singing in harmony with others In this age of major European unification and intercultural dialogue, all cultures communicate with one another in a way that is not unlike the instruments in a classical ‘concerto grosso’. National cultural institutes should recognise that the best way for them to present their individual cultures externally is to do it in concert with all other European cultures. By Horia-Roman Patapievici



I'm writing this paper in a threefold capacity: as a member of the EUNIC presidency team for three years, as head of the Romanian Cultural Institute for two terms and as a public intellectual from a formerly communist country of the European Union. It may seem somewhat incongruous that I refer to myself in this capacity, but I am very keen to ensure that we do not lose this part of our European memory and never forget the communist catastrophe that overtook the European continent. It is also important that we retain this memory as part of our awareness of a common European identity.

Allow me to briefly summarise my experiences as head of the Romanian Cultural Institute: in 2005 I took over an insti-

tute with 7 branches abroad, out of which only three were operational; currently we have 17 fully-operational branches. Before 2005, the Institute I took charge of was at best carrying out a kind of cultural diplomacy; at worst, it was engaged in propaganda for officially-sanctioned Romanian culture.

In 2010, in a presentation on the cultural policies of recent years, British policy advisor and analyst, Rod Fischer, referred to the Romanian Cultural Institute, alongside the British Council and a few other national cultural institutes, as having undergone over recent years a true paradigm shift, moving from the promotion of national culture as a form of cultural diplomacy to the promotion of direct, people-to-people cultural cooperation between two or more cultures. What I have attempted at the Romanian Cultural Institute is to free Romanian artists and purveyors of culture from the obligation of having to be the representatives of official Romanian culture for Romanian institutions.

I have refused to continue the policy in which only those artists who represent

what the authorities consider to be “national art”, “national values” and “patriotic works of art” should be promoted. I have changed the Romanian Cultural Institute from being an institution that consecrated all things national and made artists toe the official line, into an institution that refrains from promoting and instead aims to support and facilitate. The Romanian Cultural Institute has set itself the aim of enabling direct contact between the Romanian cultural market and foreign cultural markets. In other words, we have shifted from the promotion of values by means of state propaganda (no matter how soft) to facilitating direct contacts (no matter how difficult this may be), by working with a range of partners on projects which involve different cultural markets. The mission of the Institute is not so much a desire to unify the different cultural markets (a rather undesirable utopia), but as much as possible to bring them into direct contact with each other.

You can easily imagine the resistance such a cultural policy triggers in a formerly communist country, where everything had to be “official”, “national”, “patriotic”, “partisan”, “in the service of the people” and so on and so forth. I only mention this to remind you that today’s united Euro-

pe is also made up of countries that not only have different memories to those of Western Europe but that have also had a totally different experience of the public realm and public spirit.

Institutional reform developed as a result of the intellectual, moral and value clashes that were generated by this difference between the East and West European public realms. Through these institutional changes, we have transformed the Romanian Cultural Institute from an institution of cultural propaganda and cultural diplomacy (at best) into an institution answering its cultural call by harmonising its own voice with the voices of others.

A clash of values

Of course, this point of view can be rejected on purely national grounds. Ultimately, the budget of a national cultural institution is national and it reflects both a particular taxation policy and the vision of that particular nation on how it should spend its tax-payers’ money. The argument would be that it is inappropriate to spend tax-payers’ money on benefiting other cultures. This is a valid argument, in that cultural cooperation essentially leads to a “denationalisation” of the monies allocated by national institutions for national representation abroad. However, it fails to take into account the fact that major cultures, or even former cultural empires, are no longer able to go it alo-

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ne but must work together with others. The world we live in is essentially intercultural. And in the age of unavoidable contacts between cultures, national representation should take other forms, even if it is just to enable this national representation to continue.

Prior to the great post-war European unification, the great cultures gifted us a common culture. This situation can be compared to opera and its great arias – “Un bel di vedremo”, from Puccini’s “Madama Butterfly”; “Nessun dorma”, from Puccini’s “Turandot”; “Casta Diva” from Vincenzo Bellini’s “Norma”; “O mio Babino caro”, from “Gianni Schicchi” by Giacomo Puccini. All these are formidable examples of great arias that everyone knows and wants to listen to. And then there are also the pieces in between these arias which just serve to lead us towards them and highlight their uniqueness.

The great cultures, which everyone knows and wants to make their own, were like these great arias. The rest of the music was just, dare I say it, a filler, and this was the role which lesser cultures have played in the past. But today the relationship between major and minor cultures is no longer hierarchical, but dialogue-oriented. In this age of major European unification and intercultural dialogue, all cultures communicate with one another in a way that is not unlike the instruments in a concerto grosso. It is no longer the opera with its single arias that provides

us with a model for the relationship between cultures, but rather the interplay of individual instruments in a classical concerto grosso. National cultural institutes should recognise that the best way for them to present their individual cultures externally is to do it in concert with all other European cultures.

The birth of EUNIC

This brings me to the moral, institutional and intellectual environment that has led to the birth of the association of national cultural institutes. What I am going to present will not be a historic reconstruction but what Karl Popper would have called a reasonable reconstruction of history.

The original idea of creating an association of national cultural institutes in Europe was mooted in 2004 and 2005 by some of the heads of national cultural institutes and a few important cultural activists. The basic premise is extremely simple: good things can happen if people decide to work together.

What could be more obvious? In 2006, EUNIC came into existence as a partnership of public organisations working in international cultural relations and cooperation, whose members, based in European Union member states, operate at arm’s length from their national governments.

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This basic idea, though simple, was far from naïve. It hinged on two basic findings that seem fairly obvious. The first of these is that in today's world, multipolarity tends to have the upper hand over bipolarity. The second is that today's societies are no longer prepared to wait for their nation to provide them with a form of international expression.

These two factors lead directly to two conclusions. The fact that bipolarity tends to be subordinated to multipolarity has a destabilising effect on the rigid, typically modern opposition between centre and periphery, north and south, developed countries and underdeveloped or developing countries – either by an easily-predictable relativisation or by an unpredictable but extremely interesting metamorphosis.

And the fact that today's societies tend to transcend the framework of their respective nations leads to the conclusion that traditional cultural democracy has become too narrow a framework for modern societies to achieve their goals of cultural cooperation. They prefer forms of direct cooperation over those mediated by official institutions.

These two findings and their conclusions form the foundation of EUNIC's basic concept. They provide the philosophical structure that underpins both the existence and the strategic principles of the organisation.

EUNIC's members are organisations

that meet the following criteria: they support national cultural diplomacy and act as cultural relations organisations. They are funded by the public sector and operate with a degree of autonomy from government. They work outside their home countries. EUNIC does not operate on a country or inter-governmental basis: it can, and does, have more than one member from any country. It is a question of what they do, rather than which country they come from. The "EU" in the EUNIC acronym is a geographic not a political expression. To date, EUNIC consists of 29 members from 25 EU member states, operating with a degree of autonomy or at arm's length from their governments: this "arm's length" varies from case to case, depending on the institutional architecture of the country in question.

EUNIC: a brief description

EUNIC promotes European agendas and values. EUNIC is an active network encouraging members to implement shared projects at many levels. It is a learning network sharing ideas and practices between members. And it is also a partnering network working with partners including the European Commission, the Council of Europe and others around the world. It is an advocacy network raising the awareness and effectiveness of building cultural relationships between people worldwide.

EUNIC is active through an increasing diversity of projects, not only cluster-based but multi-cluster and multi-member, and advocates cultural cooperation and direct cultural relations. EUNIC members benefit from working together, formally and informally, and partnering with the European Commission as well as with other organisations. The European Commission recognises EUNIC as a source of advice and policy. Relations with the European Commission and the European External Action Service are close and supportive. In 2007, for example, the European Commission sent a letter to all its Delegations asking them to support the work of their EUNIC clusters.

Today EUNIC has over 65 clusters worldwide, carrying out over 400 shared activities in 2011. The most effective clusters develop over 10 projects a year; innovative projects that go beyond the standard arts festivals. The commonwealth of EUNIC consists of over 2,000 branches in over 130 countries, with over 25,000 staff, including over 7,000 teachers, teaching over 2 million students a year and providing over 8 million language qualifications. It is highly revealing for the EUNIC potential that in 2011, the 29 EUNIC members had a turnover of over 2.5 billion euros.

To sum up, how can EUNIC be described? EUNIC is a network, not an organisation. As with all networks, members get out of it what they put in. The

heads of EUNIC member institutes may all have their own reasons for joining the network, but all share the same desire to work together.

There is a strategic and operational added-value in their membership. EUNIC presents itself to the outside world in everything it does, not just in jointly-organised activities. It is the size and collective expertise of our member organisations that gives us our reputation and influence. One way to look at EUNIC is by comparing it with the airline alliances, such as Star Alliance and Sky Team. Each airline is independent and has its own brand, but as an alliance they come together in order to lobby as a single body, code-share (similar to our joint projects), learn from each other and strive towards similar standards (as in our teaching centres).

From the accidental to the strategic

The year 2010/2011 was a decisive phase in EUNIC's growth from the accidental to the strategic. This phrase was coined by the General Secretary of the Goethe Institute, Hans-Georg Knopp, a former president of EUNIC. EUNIC's operating strategy was agreed on at a meeting of institute heads in Brussels in December 2010, and a budget was set. The strategy includes an office in Brussels, scheduled

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to open in September 2011, and a think tank designed to provide the heads with expert advice.

This strategy group has already started work and delivered its first reports at the biannual heads’ meeting in Lisbon in June 2011. At the heads’ meeting in Bucharest in June 2010, the question of membership was resolved. At present there are clear rules on the membership of clusters: every member at head level can nominate a representative in every cluster to become a full member. Cultural institutes automatically become full members. For embassies, the decision is taken centrally rather than locally (embassies can easily become associate members. This, for example, means that Switzerland and Norway can be included at cluster level).

Moreover, at the heads’ meeting in Brussels in December 2010, we voted in favour of Hosting EUNIC, a mechanism meant to “equalise” the presence of all EUNIC members in the EUNIC network. It allows EUNIC members who do not benefit from an institutional presence in an area of interest to be hosted with concrete projects by one of the institutes already present there.

Despite the fact that EUNIC is limited to the EU countries and membership is restricted to organisations based in the

EU, EUNIC members operate in over 130 countries. There are clusters in over 50 countries and the number is growing rapidly.

I would like to finish off by looking at the tasks which EUNIC may be facing from a philosophical perspective. These thoughts are a result of my experiences as a member of the EUNIC presidential team and as head of a national cultural institute. I would like to make two points.

Firstly, what I like to call the “double visibility” extended to a given society by a good cultural programme or a good cultural strategy.

Double visibility

In order to clarify what I mean, let me start with a question: why would a national cultural institute invest significant amounts of its budget in cultural programmes? One of the reasons for this is clear – to promote its national culture. This is clearly a nationalistic strategy that can assume the form of soft cultural diplomacy or hard cultural propaganda. Both are legitimate objectives, though when it comes to ‘national culture’, the emphasis is different in each case. Cultural diplomacy seeks to promote national culture by emphasizing ‘culture’, while cultural propaganda promotes national culture by laying the stress on ‘national’.

In the post-WWII and post-Holocaust

period, Europe went through a very unusual phase. Western countries decided not to behave in a Hobbesian way, involving being perpetual enemies in a never-ending war. The result of this was the creation of the European Community. The desire for unity became the centre point of joint economic cooperation.

After 1989, the collapse of the communist regimes made it possible for the whole of Europe to be peacefully united for the very first time, despite the historical conflicts between religious, political and cultural traditions which are still going on to this day. The European Community became a European Union, an entity that is at heart a political and profound institutional cooperation among member states. A union that was founded for the purposes of economic cooperation had developed into a institutional, political union.

In these circumstances, cultural diplomacy tends to turn into overly-rigid cultural promotion centred on the idea of the nation state. Why is it “overly-rigid”? Because the most important contact processes within the European Union are no longer based on propaganda and promotion. Rather, they are geared towards direct cooperation. It is not nation states that foster direct contact, but their societies and cultural markets.

Post-modern societies transcend the borders of nation states that used to present the only opportunity for international representation. Now societies repre-

sent themselves and transcend national borders with their culture of contact and direct relationships with other cultures in their main markets. We are unconsciously witnessing a paradigm shift that is gradually being embraced by everyone who is engaged in the cultural sector. National cultural institutes are increasingly moving away from traditional cultural diplomacy into direct people-to-people cooperation.

National cultural institutes must be alert to, and conscious of, these developments. A consequence of this shift is the answer to the question: ‘Who and what does a cultural programme make visible?’ During the days of cultural propaganda, a cultural programme made visible a given cultural ideology, namely, a particular official’s view of the country’s national culture. In times of softer cultural diplomacy, a cultural programme makes visible a given cultural identity, namely, a certain vision of institutions with regard to a given society’s or nations’ cultural identity.

Nowadays, in these times of direct cultural cooperation, a cultural programme makes visible cultural aspects of a given society from the ground up. This provides us with what could be called a vision of ‘a society’s cultural anatomy’. And, as direct cultural cooperation is based on equality, a double visibility is achieved: both the source and the target society in-

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volved become visible via a good cultural cooperation programme. Both the offer and the acceptance become visible in the process of giving. Cultural cooperation programmes mean that both societies become visible to each other.

A society's cultural anatomy

From this, a well-functioning national cultural institute will make sure it makes the culture it is involved with visible to the society it represents. If I open a Romanian Cultural Institute in South Africa, it must not only represent Romanian culture in South Africa, but also offer an image of South African society in Romania. If the programmes I am working on do not make South African society visible to Romanians, then I have failed. I believe this is the only possible view that can be held by a modern cultural institute.

This new situation obviously represents an advance in our knowledge, even if this progress is more of a possibility than an obligation. What is really relevant though is that, at least in principle, a given society's most hidden and deepest realms can become visible to another society's artists and cultural proponents. Cultural institutes can make intelligent use of this potential resource. Cultural programmes can be much more than just the presentation and representation mechanisms of the arts showcase. They can be used as in-

telligent instruments of knowledge, both with a view to investing cognitive content into today's generalised democracy, and to offering the double cultural visibility that is in such demand in modern society.

Secondly, cultural institutes need to have the right attitude towards culture. As I mentioned earlier, the promotion of culture by institutions has been through several stages: instrumentalisation by the state, cultural propaganda, cultural diplomacy, and cultural cooperation. A possible future could consist of creating direct contacts between cultural markets. This cooperation would allow for the separation of the market's value-oriented criteria, but would not mean an aggregation of the markets or the value-oriented criteria. In this way there would be even more profound cultural contact that goes beyond cultural cooperation in the same way that cultural cooperation goes beyond cultural diplomacy. It is about creating contacts between cultural markets, without dissolving them into one single market. In our specialist jargon we say that we are developing an approach with a "common theme" and "local implementation". But it is in fact much more than this.

EUNIC will find itself confronted by increasingly unified cultural markets within Europe, while outside Europe it will come up against cultural markets that are either indifferent or hostile to unification, or tightly bound up in the centre/periphery, developed/backward dialectics.

EUNIC will be unable to respond in a uniform way to these deeply diverse challenges. A policy strategy is needed with no hidden agenda, no matter how progressive that agenda may be. Outside Europe, EUNIC should act like an old and valuable mirror that reflects local societies. The activities of EUNIC members should make visible to Europe the irreducible specificity of non-European cultures. Of course, EUNIC is going to promote European values and topics. But if it wants to penetrate into local societies, it will have to put aside its know-it-all attitude that implies EUNIC is on the side of progress while the others are still unknowingly trapped in their backwardness. Through the eyes of EUNIC clusters outside Europe we should see not nations, but their societies.

A policy strategy with no hidden agenda

Within Europe, the task of EUNIC might be to contribute culturally to the content of European identity. This is already happening. In Bucharest, for instance, I have noticed the emergence of a strong feeling of unity and solidarity. This is the result of something as simple as establishing regular meetings between the directors of all active cultural institutes in Romania's capital. Getting to know each other has resulted in new ideas, not the other way round. The founding of each EUNIC cluster is based on friendship, which is perhaps not so paradoxical. It is not only knowledge, abilities and skills that are important, but also warm rela-

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tionships. This sense of friendship can spread through society in a more lasting way than any skills that have been passed on. I believe building capacities should be seen as the development of friendly relationships.

I like to point out imponderable things because they are rarely discussed, if at all. In South Africa, where I headed up EUNIC regional office for sub-Saharan Africa, I heard philosopher and political scientist Achille Mbembe say that he'd had enough of Africans being treated like starving people. “We don't want culture as a compassion surrogate for our caved-in stomachs.” Mbembe severely criticised the instrumentalisation of culture. What I mean is that, in some instances, even the soft power of certain cultural programmes is too hard. This should provide food for thought. There are times when even compassion is a sign of arrogance. EUNIC has the momentous opportunity to build programmes outside Europe that can create direct contacts between cultural markets rather than between specialised cultural institutes.

Through the nature of its activity and its capacity to extract the tacit knowledge

of a cultural environment, EUNIC has many keys at its disposal, most of them still undiscovered.

I have a feeling that not even those of us who are directly involved in setting up and consolidating our network really have a clear view of the huge range of possibilities offered by our EUNIC project. We talk about cultural programmes, cooperation, capacity building, unifying and creating contacts between cultural markets, but there is much more to it than that. In many ways, EUNIC is a laboratory for the future.

For us as Europeans, EUNIC is a laboratory where experiments are carried out on the moral and intellectual relationships that will form the foundation of a new European identity. EUNIC is making its own modest but direct contribution to the shaping of a new European identity, and to testing out the moral equality of all the European actors, irrespective of the initial inequality of their resources. Today's Europe does not look like yesterday's, and the society created by the EU looks more like the one described by Avishai Margalit in *The Decent Society* than the one described by Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*. EUNIC's contribution to shaping a decent society in Europe is a most important one.

For societies outside Europe, I like to think that EUNIC is already a laboratory that is trying to achieve "double visibility". This is what makes me so optimistic as far as EUNIC is concerned. It is not just a union of national cultural institutes. If used properly, it can be an instrument for extracting the tacit knowledge that

lies buried in the cultural practices of a given society.

At its best, EUNIC embodies global creativity born out of joining together local initiatives. You never know how much you can achieve until you join forces. EUNIC allows the type of creativity to emerge that even creative people do not see before they realise by virtue of their own work how creative they actually are.

But this remarkable potential will not be fully capitalised upon unless EUNIC and our national cultural institutes observe a few simple, yet vital, rules which I picked up from all corners of the globe during my year as EUNIC president. I have brought together ten of these rules to create a Ten Commandments of Good Practice that should be observed by every good national cultural institute in Europe:

- 1 Never act alone
- 2 Always strive for cooperation
- 3 Don't be patronising
- 4 Make it possible
- 5 Be part of it
- 6 Get involved
- 7 Be committed
- 8 Make friends
- 9 Make yourself known by making others known
- 10 Get to know others by making them known

Horia-Roman Patapievic is an essayist, publicist, TV producer and president of the Romanian Cultural Institute. He was president of EUNIC from 2010-2011.