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The European Union's Multi-Level Cultural  
Diplomacy vis-à-vis the United States of America

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## Abstract

This paper examines *how, to what extent and why the EU engages in cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US*. While providing an empirical review of and conceptual reflection on the current state of the EU's (including key member states') efforts at employing cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US, the paper also strives to explain the forms of this activity. It argues that a multi-level EU cultural diplomacy in the US does exist, but that its potential is currently underused. As could be expected, the EU Delegation to the US seems to be most willing to pursue EU cultural diplomacy, whereas the extent of EU cultural diplomacy at the level of coordinated activities between the EU and the member states, as well as at the member state level remains low. This finding can be explained primarily with a latent competition between member states. While the general motivation to engage in cultural diplomacy can be interest- or value-driven – and is in the case of EU cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US arguably both –, it is undeniable that, in a country like the US, the interest-driven soft power competition that is often a key incentive for actors to engage in cultural diplomacy activities *at all* plays out negatively inside the EU. These findings are corroborated by a brief discussion of the potential acceptance of EU cultural action in the US, which highlights how, despite positive perceptions of European culture as such, the EU is hardly recognized as an actor in the field of culture.

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## 1. Introduction

Culture is often said to play a central role in the transatlantic relationship, understood here as the relations between the United States and the European Union (EU), including its member states. For most of the post-WWII period, hardly any relevant public intervention by a key political figure from either side of the Atlantic missed out on conjuring the 'cultural ties that bind us so closely', to quote an expression used in an emblematic speech by the General Secretary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Fogh Rasmussen 2014).

Though oft-evoked in political discourse, the supposed strong transatlantic cultural linkages have hardly been scrutinized by policy analysts (for exceptions, see Menon 2013; Lucarelli 2006). They simply seem to be taken for granted – essentially for two reasons. First, the United States and the EU have long been said to form a community of 'shared values' related to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and a liberal market economy (Deutsch *et al.* 1957). These values were grounded in common cultural references and underpinned the legal-political foundations of societies on both sides of the Atlantic, influencing their foreign policy agendas in ways that often allowed for a convergence of positions embodied in the support for the post-war global order in the security (NATO), economic (Bretton Woods institutions) and other policy (United Nations bodies) domains. Second, the history of the US as a country of immigration, initially primarily from the other side of the Atlantic, has implied that many Americans with roots in Europe have felt a strong cultural and emotional affinity with the European continent (Tocci & Alcaro 2014).

Both these motivations for presupposing the existence of a transatlantic cultural community are currently challenged. Political forces on each side of the Atlantic have begun to question the 'Western order' and the processes of globalization that it has allowed for and underpinned. Donald Trump's election as US President based on anti-liberal and anti-globalization rhetoric, garnished with a good dose of anti-Europeanism, best exemplifies this trend, placing a severe strain on transatlantic relations. This goes at least for the relations with the EU institutions, but also with the governments of key EU

member states.<sup>2</sup> The resulting challenges to the shared values underpinning transatlantic relations are exacerbated by changing demographics: the supposed 'link generated by a common cultural heritage is waning as the cohort of American[s] ... who served in Europe dwindles and US-born citizens of European descent reach an umpteenth generation' (ibid.: 381).

While it is possible that Trump's presidency will be remembered as exceptional and followed by a reinvigorated US-EU relationship, the currently observable transatlantic divergence is part of a longer trend. In past decades, talk about transatlantic cultural ties has often served to cover up existing discontent and tensions in transatlantic relations (Danchev 2005). Trump's predecessor Obama, who proclaimed himself 'America's first Pacific president' (Obama 2009), demonstrated a certain neglect for Europe during most of his two terms in office. Before him, George W. Bush had alienated many Europeans by unilaterally going to war in Iraq, laying bare profound transatlantic value differences and provoking a drift in transatlantic relations (alongside rifts inside the EU) (Levy *et al.* 2005).

All these trends towards a widening of the transatlantic gap have also shown in opinion polls. Already for 2014, the German Marshall Fund of the US (GMFUS 2015: 22) noted that the 'Transatlantic Relationship Cools Noticeably on European Side', indicating a steep increase – to an average of 50% – in the number of Europeans who wished to see greater independence from the US. Most recently, the polls indicate further alienation, with steep drops in the number of people who have 'favorable views' of the United States, notably in the larger European countries (Germany: 35%, France: 46%; Pew Research Center 2017). Vice-versa, US visions of the European Union are often based on limited awareness and knowledge of its political and institutional set-up. In 2015, a survey commissioned by the European Commission found that among the EU's ten strategic partner countries, the US was the country with the second-lowest awareness of the EU after Canada (Public Policy and Management Institute *et al.* 2015).

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<sup>2</sup> Trump's discourse seems to resonate more within EU countries that are themselves undergoing transformations towards – in Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán's words – 'illiberal democracies', such as Hungary and Poland (Orbán 2014).

While none of these polls provide conclusive evidence for the strength of transatlantic cultural ties, which is notoriously hard to measure, the above trends do point towards the observation that claims of 'cultural proximity' and the appeal to 'shared values' in transatlantic relations require closer scrutiny. It seems therefore necessary and timely to investigate to what extent the EU and the US are engaged in relations focused on culture to examine whether and to what extent 'soft power' is at play in this bilateral relationship. Soft power, 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment' (Nye 2004: 5), relies heavily on the attraction potential of culture. Especially at times of political tension, it can provide an important means for reinforcing a relationship.

Focusing on the EU perspective, this paper examines *how, to what extent and why the EU engages in cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the United States*. While providing an empirical review of and conceptual reflection on the current state of the EU's (including key member states') efforts at employing cultural diplomacy (CD) vis-à-vis the US, the paper also strives to explain the forms of this activity. In so doing, it does not only contribute to a better understanding of an understudied aspect of transatlantic relations, but also embeds itself into a debate about the EU's emerging cultural diplomacy, which has recently been boosted with the desire to work 'Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations', as expressed in the title of a 2016 Joint Communication by the European Commission and the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy (EC & High Representative 2016; see, for an overview, EL-CSID 2018, Schunz 2018). While the Union generally recognizes the potential of cultural relations with third countries, its strategic debate is focused notably on its neighborhood, sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, but also China. Reflecting the abovementioned trends, North America is rather absent from these debates, even if the Union and many of its members do of course engage in cultural activities on the continent, including in the US (Fisher 2014). Given the limited scholarly attention paid to these activities (see, however, Davis Cross 2014), this paper thus strives to fill an empirical and conceptual research gap with regard to EU cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis a major developed country partner. In so doing, it aims to contribute to the emerging literature on the EU's cultural diplomacy, employing a framework inspired by the concept of 'actorness' (Bretherton & Vogler 2006; Kingah & Van Langenhove 2012).

To do so, and respond to the above research questions, the paper proceeds as follows: first, it outlines an analytical framework by providing key definitions, disentangling the conceptual field surrounding 'cultural relations and diplomacy' by taking inspiration from foreign policy analysis, and offering a few methodological pointers. In its main part, the paper then answers the question how and to what extent the EU engages in transatlantic cultural activities. It argues that an EU cultural diplomacy in the US does exist, but that its potential is currently underused. By briefly discussing the potential acceptance of EU cultural diplomacy by US elites and general audiences, it also highlights the lack of recognition of the EU as an actor in the domain of culture. In the subsequent section, the current form of EU transatlantic cultural diplomacy is explained with the EU's and its member states' desire to be perceived as an attractive partner by the US, which is however constrained by EU member states' subtle competition for US attention. Synthesizing the findings, the conclusion offers a future-oriented reflection on the effectiveness of the EU's transatlantic CD.

## 2. Analytical framework

### 2.1. Defining EU cultural diplomacy

The term 'cultural diplomacy' has been at the centre of debates in both academia and policy-making for decades. An agreed definition is far off, as interpretations diverge along two axes, concerning the 'cultural' and 'diplomacy' components of the term (see e.g. Gienow-Hecht 2010).

On the one hand, the term 'diplomacy' might suggest restricting the reach of the concept to relations that are explicitly guided by governmental agents, as opposed to (cultural) relations between nations and their peoples that 'grow naturally and organically, without government intervention' (Arndt 2005: xviii). Over time, however, the concept has increasingly been enlarged to include both dimensions, and thus also people-to-people contacts and cultural actions developed by private and civil society actors (Isar 2010). On the other hand, visions of how and what 'culture', broadly defined as a 'set of distinctive



spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group ... that ... encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs' (UNESCO 1982), should be used in diplomatic contexts differ. A narrow definition of CD would perceive it as a process of displaying a country's cultural production in an effort to enhance its image and political clout vis-à-vis another country. This idea of the use of culture in external relations is tied to the notion of soft power, in a world where 'the ability to affect what other countries want tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions' (Nye 1990). However, the use of culture in external relations can also take a broader, more interactive and participatory form in the target country, by involving local cultural actors in processes of co-creation and mutual exchange. From this perspective, culture has a role in supporting economic and social development and can take the form of capacity-building activities in the cultural sector, cultural exchanges and intercultural dialogue (Isar 2010).

In the European Union context, various terminologies, including the notion of 'international cultural relations' (ICR) employed in the 2016 Joint Communication, but also 'cultural diplomacy', co-exist (Trobbiani 2017). The Union's preference for employing the more neutral term of ICR can be explained by two forms of resistances to the notion of 'cultural diplomacy': some member states prefer not to see the Union engage in any form of 'diplomacy' in this policy domain<sup>3</sup>, whereas many cultural stakeholders are reluctant to be co-opted into EU foreign policy (Isar 2010). The distinction between various terms is less salient for scholarly enquiry. Once cultural stakeholders make use of EU funding and technical support, they take part in implementing EU policy objectives, regardless of whether they perceive themselves as EU agents or not. In this sense, the agents of EU CD can be very diverse, and so can be the types of cultural activities they undertake. While this contribution focuses on governmental initiatives and not so much on the 'transnational transatlantic', it considers all of the following CD instruments: cultural exchange and dialogue (e.g. mobility programmes), cultural display and informational tools (e.g.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Article 6 TFEU, the EU only has the competence to support, coordinate or supplement member states' policies in the cultural domain.

information sources including new media), capacity-building (e.g. supporting libraries) and language teaching (Maaß 2015).

Relying on a broad definition of culture in a foreign policy analysis context, this paper understands 'EU culture' as in the way it is defined in the EU treaties, namely as comprising tangible and intangible cultures of EU member states and the EU's own 'common cultural heritage' (Article 167(1) TFEU, see also Calligaro 2014).

The EU as a cultural actor can therefore present itself as both an embodiment of a shared history and as the defendant of European cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue. CD in an EU context represents thus the deliberate use of culture as defined above in external relations, either for its own sake (for traditional cultural policy goals) or in support of foreign policy objectives based on a range of activities and conducted by agents including the EU institutions, its member states and cultural actors when they implement EU goals. The foreign policy objectives that the EU pursues can be related to the promotion of its image or specific interests, but also EU values such as democracy and especially the notion of cultural diversity, embodied in the Union's motto 'unity in diversity'.

## **2.2. Analyzing EU cultural diplomacy**

To analyse EU cultural diplomacy as the recent foreign policy activity of a non-traditional foreign policy actor, it can be useful to draw on the insights of two sets of literatures: foreign policy analysis as applied to the EU (Keukeleire & Delreux 2014), which allows for treating CD as a form of foreign policy, and regionalism studies, which help to account for the specificity of the EU as a global player in the making (Kingah & Van Langenhove 2012).

In EU foreign policy analysis, a key debate revolves around the question of 'actorness', that is the EU's capacity to act externally, which in an area of supplementary competence like culture is still evolving (Schunz 2018). Actorness examines the external context of EU action ('opportunity'), its own 'presence', as well as its 'capability', that is, 'the internal context of EU external action' (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 29). Actorness *per se* only indicates whether

the EU *can* act externally in a given context, but does not propose to examine how it acts, nor whether its action yields impacts.

While the 'opportunity' for EU external cultural action in the US is briefly discussed at the beginning of the analysis for contextualization purposes, emphasis is placed here on the notions of presence and capability. Expanding on these aspects of actorness from a broader regionalism perspective, Van Langenhove and colleagues propose an analytical framework that assesses these two dimensions by expanding on what they term 'willingness' and 'capacity', while also adding considerations on the 'acceptance' of regional organisations (Kingah *et al.* 2016; Kingah & Van Langenhove 2012; Zwartjes *et al.* 2012). The 'willingness' of a regional organisation (but also a state) to pursue certain targets and courses of action – such as cultural diplomacy – can be examined based on the existence of strategic policy documents, legal texts as well as declarations by key policy-makers indicating targets and support for the broader policy. Its 'capacity' relates to the institutionalization of policy activities, and the human, financial, institutional and technical resources devoted to pursuing policy goals. Capacity here transcends the mere notion of Bretherton and Vogler's 'capability' and is understood more broadly as incorporating presence and both the *potential* for action and the *actual use* of that potential. Left outside of this core analysis, 'acceptance' depicts the reception of this regional actor's policies by national and local stakeholders as well as citizens of a target country. Just like 'opportunity', acceptance can only be briefly discussed here to contextualize the findings. Rather than a measurement of the 'impact' of EU action, which faces obstacles both in terms of reliable methodologies and means available for this research, 'acceptance' adds a dynamic and policy-specific reflection on the EU's perceived actorness, clarifying the opportunities and constraints presented by the external context. This differentiates the current framework from approaches analysing 'impact' as part of 'EU performance', usually in narrower and already structured policy domains, or on particular occasions such as negotiations on a specific treaty (Blavoukos 2015; Blavoukos & Bourantonis 2017).

These conceptual considerations yield the framework for analysing EU CD in the US, including the indicators for each of the criteria, depicted in Box 1.

### Box 1: Analyzing EU cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the United States

(CONTEXT – External opportunity for EU external cultural action vis-à-vis the US)

#### CORE ANALYSIS: EU CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

##### 1. Willingness for EU external cultural action vis-à-vis the US

- 1.1 *Target-setting*: Inclusion of cultural diplomacy objectives in relevant legal and policy documents
- 1.2 *Support*: Presence of committed leaders in EU institutions and/or member states ('policy entrepreneurs')

##### 2. Capacity for EU external cultural action vis-à-vis the US

- 2.1 *Institutionalization*: Establishment of institutions/agencies dedicated to promoting CD objectives in the US
- 2.2 *Agency*: Engaged and skilled human resources to support cultural diplomacy objectives in the US
- 2.3 *Means and instruments*: Financial resources and instruments to pursue CD objectives, including: cultural exchange and dialogue, cultural display and informational tools, capacity-building and language teaching

(CONTEXT: Acceptance of EU cultural action in and by the US)

- 3.1 *Public acceptance*: Committed citizenry in the US
- 3.2 *Elite acceptance*: Buy-in from cultural and political stakeholders in the US

Source: adapted from Bretherton & Vogler 2006; Kingah et al. 2016; Kingah & Van Langenhove 2012

Given the EU's multi-level character and the supplementary nature of its legal competence on culture, a further distinction needs to be made between three levels of policy-making in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of EU CD vis-à-vis the US: the EU level, the level of coordinated efforts that brings together the member states and EU institutions, and the EU member states level. All three levels contribute to a broadly defined EU CD. Willingness and capacity are therefore examined through sub-sections dedicated to:

- (i) *EU policies* defined by EU institutions and bodies, and mainly sustained by the EU budget and human and technical resources;
- (ii) *coordinated efforts among member states*, partly with support from the EU, through the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network or other arrangements;
- (iii) *actions by 'the big three' EU member states*, Germany, France and the UK<sup>4</sup>, analysed in a comparative perspective.

While these levels de facto complement each other, and thus combine into the EU's broad CD, the analytical distinction between them helps to uncover patterns of EU CD,

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<sup>4</sup> As a more extensive analysis of EU members states' cultural diplomacies would go beyond the scope of this contribution, emphasis is placed on France, Germany and the UK given their important CD resources in general and in the US.

particularly the degree of willingness and the extent of potential and actually used capacity at each of the levels.

As a heuristic device, we posit that the degree of willingness can be strong, medium or weak, depending on whether there are very clearly circumscribed and explicit EU CD targets supported by a strong group of policy entrepreneurs (strong), some targets and a certain support for them (medium), or very few clear or even no targets and little support for EU CD (weak). In a similar vein, the capacity of EU CD at each of the levels can be considered as strong if they are solidly institutionalized, supported by a considerable number of dedicated and active staff, and relying on a set of tailor-made instruments. If there is some form of institutionalization, supported by some staff and means, this capacity is medium. In cases of limited institutional anchorage, limited to no staff and means, it is weak. The extent of EU CD then depends on a qualitative assessment combining the two factors, and can be high (if one dimension is strong and the other at least medium), moderate (if both are medium) or low (if at least one is weak and none is strong).

The understanding of EU transatlantic cultural diplomacy obtained through this analysis answers the 'how' and 'to what extent' parts of the research question, providing a clear picture of the types of activities and their strengths. To answer the question 'why' the EU engages in cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US (and why in the way it does), the contribution draws on recent attempts to explain EU external engagement in 'soft power' domains like culture or science (Schunz 2018; López de San Román & Schunz 2018). They argue that EU external action emerges as a result of policy entrepreneurs mobilizing in response to external incentives, either on the basis of interests and a logic of consequence or of norms and a logic of appropriateness (or a combination of both).

Expanding on that literature, and in analogy to the academic debate about 'science diplomacy', which distinguishes between 'science for diplomacy' (the use of science and research to pursue diplomatic goals) and 'diplomacy for science' (the use of diplomatic means to promote a country's science and research-related policy objectives) (Royal Society 2010), (EU) cultural diplomacy can take three different forms embodying different

underlying rationales for engaging in CD. These forms are distinct when it comes to the objectives pursued, the instruments employed and the target audiences aimed at (see Table 1). *First*, ‘diplomacy for culture’ depicts the use of diplomatic means to promote a country’s (or the EU’s) cultural policy objectives *only*. Here, diplomacy becomes instrumental for the purpose of promoting the normative objective of fostering cultural exchange and *cooperation* based on a respect for cultural diversity. It usually involves a government-initiated framework stipulating bottom-up dynamics, with cultural actors driving exchanges and deciding on contents. *Second*, CD can also take the form of ‘culture for diplomacy’, which involves an instrumental use of culture. As a vehicle, culture can be used for two main purposes: on the one hand, it can be employed as soft power projection for (nation-)branding, responding to a desire to pursue material interests in a *competitive* context and targeting both elites and broader publics in a third country by showcasing one’s culture; on the other hand, culture can be a vehicle to attain other external policy objectives. This implies targeting specific audiences and linking culture to a particular issue (e.g. climate change) in order to draw attention to that issue or promote cooperation on that basis. Culture for diplomacy usually involves rather strong governmental steering.

**Table 1: Forms of (EU) cultural diplomacy**

	Diplomacy for culture	Culture for diplomacy	
	<i>Diplomacy for the sake of cultural policy</i>	<i>Culture for the sake of EU-/nation-branding</i>	<i>Culture for the sake of other external policies</i>
<b>Objectives</b>	Cultural policy objectives	Soft power projection	External policy goals beyond culture
<b>Typical instruments</b>	Grants for cooperation and exchange projects; mobility programmes	Events (exhibitions); capacity-building; language courses	Issue-linkage via specific events; flagship projects
<b>Target audiences</b>	Cultural actors; broader public	Elites; broader public	Issue-specific elites; (broader public)

Source: Authors’ compilation

As these three forms of cultural diplomacy follow different logics, understanding which of the logics dominates – by way of engaging in ‘pattern-matching’ between the above expected patterns and the observed patterns of EU action (Yin 1984) – helps to explain the main motivations for why CD is pursued in the way it is. This is not to imply, however, that these logics are mutually exclusive. A single actor can be engaged in various forms of CD

activities: as norm-driven promoter of cultural diversity, as image booster, and as issue-linker using culture to pursue other external policy aims.

In methodological terms, the contribution relies on document analysis and a set of semi-structured interviews, which are complemented by secondary literature. At the three levels of analysis, the analyzed documents include fundamental texts (legal texts, other official documents, website information) regarding both the analyzed actors' cultural diplomacy strategies in general and their culture-focused relations with the US. They were selected as a result of a search for guidelines by the EU, EUNIC and each of the three member states for the use of culture vis-à-vis the US, as well as for data on resources and instruments mobilized in the pursuit of this goal. Additionally, five semi-structured interviews were conducted between September 2017 and February 2018 with officials from the EU Delegation to the US, EU member state ministries and representatives from EUNIC Global and EUNIC USA (see Annex). The interviewees were selected for being high-ranking representatives in charge of cultural relations between their organization and the US (Goethe-Institut, Alliance Française, EUNIC Global) or key officials specifically tasked with culture within a broader organization operating in the US (EU Delegation, German Embassy in Washington, DC). In the case of the British Council (UK), no interview was conducted, but key information was obtained via e-mail. The analysis focuses on the most recent past and spans from 2011, the year of the launch of the EU Preparatory Action for Culture in External Relations (see European Parliament 2011) to 2017, occasionally making reference to the period 2007<sup>5</sup> to 2011.

### 3. Understanding EU cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the United States

This section discusses the EU's and its key member states' cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US, starting with a brief consideration of the 'opportunity' for such activities, before focusing on willingness and capacity by distinguishing between the EU level and the levels

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<sup>5</sup> The 2007 Commission Communication '*European agenda for culture in a globalizing world*', is widely perceived to have opened the current process of policy formulation on the use of culture in EU external relations.

of coordinated and individual member states' activities. It concludes with a short discussion of the acceptance of the EU as cultural actor in the US.

### **3.1. Opportunity**

The United States of America provide a promising but challenging external context and target country for cultural diplomacy activities in general, and for those of the EU in particular.

On the one hand, given its federal system of government, as well as the high degrees of freedom enjoyed by the cultural sector in the US, there are a priori many points of attachment for interaction with US governmental and especially societal actors as well as citizens (Fisher 2014). Moreover, as a liberal and open country of immigration, the United States have historically stood for (cultural) pluralism and openness to the world. Migrants have shaped the 'melting pot' that is the US, and many of them stemmed from Europe. According to the latest available data, around 42 million Americans trace back their roots to Germany, 30 million to Ireland, 25 million to the UK, 15 million to Italy, 9 million to Poland and 8 million to France (US Census Bureau 2000). These are remarkable numbers prone to facilitate the access of European countries when it comes to promoting their culture, including language, in the United States.

On the other hand, as indicated earlier, not only are these demographics changing, imposing the need to address novel audiences, such as the growing population with Latin American origins in the US, but it is an altogether daunting challenge to be having to promote the EU as a supranational entity to which no US citizen may feel emotionally attached. What is more, the political differences between the US and its long-time Western allies are becoming more pronounced. While the political polarization of US society, and with it the resistance to 'liberal' ideas, predates the Trump Presidency, the latter makes trends that complicate any form of European cultural diplomacy in the country more visible. One such trend concerns the growing strength of fundamentalist religious movements (see e.g. Christerson and Flory 2017), which stands emblematically for an accentuation of cultural differences between Europe and the US. Moreover, this



polarization finds its geographical expression in the divide between a more liberal, outward-looking population on the East and West Coasts and a more inward-looking group of US citizens in 'heartland America', which – given the vastness of the country – demands that any CD effort must ensure a strong presence across the entire country. Given the variety of the targeted audiences, this presence needs to be tailored in terms of strategy and instruments.

In short, while the US provides a strong opportunity for engagement through culture, demographic, political and geographical challenges make this opportunity particularly hard to exploit for any European actor, and particularly the European Union as such.

### **3.2. Willingness for external cultural action vis-à-vis the US**

Willingness relies on the capacity to formulate targets while mobilising support for them.

#### **EU level**

EU-level transatlantic CD comprises essentially actions of the EU Delegation to the US (EUD).

#### *Target-setting*

EU-US cultural relations were first addressed in the 1995 'New Transatlantic Agenda', which identified 'the need to strengthen and broaden public support for our partnership' by seeking 'to deepen the commercial, social, cultural, scientific and educational ties among our people' (EU & US 1995). Consequently, the Agenda comprised a 'people-to-people' dimension for 'building bridges across the Atlantic' (ibid). However, despite some EU public diplomacy activities in the US, including people-to-people contacts as well as educational cooperation, an official EU strategy for the use of culture in transatlantic relations has never existed.<sup>6</sup> When the process of policy formulation regarding a general EU cultural diplomacy started with the 2007 *European agenda for culture in a globalizing world* (EC 2007), no mention was made of the United States (Schwencke & Rydzy 2015).

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<sup>6</sup> For a critical analysis of EU public diplomacy instruments vis-à-vis the US, see Scott-Smith (2005).

The same can be observed for the multiple Action Plans and Work Programs published in the run-up to the 2016 Joint Communication, which itself only refers to the US by briefly underlining the existing strong transatlantic cultural ties (EC & High Representative 2016: 14).

Despite the lack of a centralized strategy for the use of culture vis-à-vis the US, the EU Delegation to the US nowadays possesses a structured approach to the use of culture for advancing the EU's agenda in the country. This approach does not simply aim at showcasing European cultural heritage, but comprises a clear attempt to link EU CD to policy issues that constitute a priority for the EU (Interview 2). Central themes in the most recent past have been climate change, energy and security (ibid.). The objective is thus to use culture as a vehicle for advancing mutual understanding on pressing problems. The EUD's approach also operates with priorities when it comes to the scope of its target audience, both in geographical terms and with regard to various societal groups. Beyond Washington, it desires to employ the vast network of member states' cultural institutes, the Jean Monnet network as well as new technologies (ibid.). In terms of target groups, ethnic constituencies that have no ties with Europe are increasingly moving center-stage (ibid.).

### *Support*

The absence of an EU cultural diplomacy strategy dedicated to the US may provide some indications as to the limited level of support not so much to the idea of an EU CD itself, but to that of extending it to a highly developed country like the US. Indeed, the current EU framework for external cultural policy seems to prioritise developing countries, and the appetite of EU policy-makers as well as major member states to – at the EU level (in contrast to the member state level, as argued below) – invest into transatlantic cultural relations seems limited (Interviews 1, 2, 3).

Nonetheless, as part of the 2013-2014 'Preparatory Action on Culture in EU External Relations', a country report was dedicated to the US, assessing transatlantic cultural diplomacy and opportunities for future strategies (Fisher 2014). Moreover, key EU policy-makers' discourse on the 'transatlantic bond' (for instance, Mogherini 2015) continues to

display a level of support for transatlantic cultural exchange that finds its expression in the EUD's current practice of cultural diplomacy in the US. Being one of the few EU Delegations with dedicated staff to work on culture, EU representatives on the ground can be considered as policy entrepreneurs that actively support the use of culture in a variety of ways.

In spite of the absence of specific political statements supporting a strengthened EU-level cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US, practice thus shows that the country *de facto* represents an important arena of EU CD. This is indicative of a strong willingness for such CD in the US.

### **Level of coordinated EU action**

When it comes to coordinated EU cultural diplomacy, that is, actions that bring together member state cultural diplomats potentially with the support of the EU, the main actor is arguably the network of European Union National Institutes for Culture. EUNIC operates with a variety of active 'local clusters' across the globe, three of which are located in the States: in Washington, DC, New York and Chicago (Interview 1).

### *Target-setting*

To date, cluster activities, including in the US, have not been guided by official country-specific strategies, and have mostly depended on the leadership of certain cultural institutes and specific local conditions (ibid.). In 2017, EUNIC signed an administrative agreement with the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in view of improving the coordination of EU external cultural action (EEAS 2017). On this basis, the EUNIC global office in Brussels (EUNIC Global) has been gathering evidence from the work of clusters in 14 countries and their cooperation with EUDs and national cultural attachés in order to support the design of country-specific strategies. While this evidence-gathering reveals that EUNIC members have different understandings of cultural relations – primarily as display of national culture for some; as inclusive exchanges and long-term capacity-building for others – existing activities at the cluster/coordinated level tend to focus on the latter type (McIntosh 2015). This shift from

showcasing EU culture to understanding culture as a vehicle for mutual understanding is fully in line with the goals proposed by the 2016 Joint Communication.

In the context of these debates pointing toward a stronger institutionalization of and target formulation at the coordinated level of EU cultural diplomacy, a EUNIC strategy for the US is currently in the making.

### *Support*

Where EUNIC Global is attempting to provide global leadership to its local clusters, stylizing itself as a policy entrepreneur of sorts for a more strongly coordinated EU external cultural action (Interviews 1, 3, 4), the US does not feature among the priorities of EUNIC members. In 2015, 11 EUNIC members were asked in which countries they would like to share premises and work together in the future. The US did not make it on this list, which included emerging actors like China and India and developing countries like those in the Middle East and North Africa (McIntosh 2015). This absence of the US as a priority country is not to imply that there is no support for coordinated EU action among the EUNIC members active in the US. However, based on interviews with representatives from EUNIC, Germany and France, this support remains limited (Interviews 1, 3, 4). Given their (varying, but usually strong) degree of autonomy from political steering, national cultural institutes clearly perceive themselves as independent agents fulfilling tasks related to the *national* cultures they are supposed to represent in the US. While this does not preclude coordination with other EU members' cultural institutes, this is far from primordial and tends to be limited to ad hoc collaboration.

In sum, while EUNIC aims to create a more strategic cooperation among member states institutes in the US, this remains work in progress. So far, the willingness to engage in coordinated action has been medium and focussed on certain events, as discussed below.

### **Member state level**

EU member states have traditionally been very willing to engage in cultural activities vis-à-vis the US, as the examples of France, Germany and the UK illustrate.

## *Target-setting*

France has a long-standing and structured approach to cultural diplomacy ever since the creation of a Directorate for Cultural Relations within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1945. CD is now a competence of the Directorate for Globalization, Development and Partnerships, whose efforts are supported by a specific budgetary program on what in 2012 began to be termed 'diplomatie culturelle et d'influence' (cultural and influence diplomacy) (Schneider 2015). The financial appropriation is accompanied by a French Senate report (2017) taking stock of recent developments, challenges and priorities, and providing guidance to the country's cultural diplomacy. In general, the priorities of French CD include the promotion of the French language and culture, of international cultural exchanges and of cultural diversity, with a specific focus on the 'exception culturelle', which posits that cultural goods should be exempt from the rules of free trade (Schneider 2015: 362). Apart from defending the notion of cultural exception in an EU trade context, the French CD strategy does not specifically refer to the EU as a framework for external cultural action.

This broad strategic approach is also applicable to French CD in the US. Despite the fact that a specific US strategy does not exist, the country seems to constitute a priority, as it has been targeted by multiple campaigns and programs in recent years, notably in the field of education and 'creative industries' supporting innovative entrepreneurs (French Senate 2017).

In Germany, successive governments have taken the decision to invest into external cultural policies – even (and especially) in crisis situations (Maaß 2015: 48-51). While the general strategic objectives have been to transmit a positive image of a modern Germany via dialogue on culture and intercultural exchange, but also the promotion of the German language (Auswärtiges Amt 2017), recent strategies include an explicit attention to the European context: 'Europe is also a cultural project. That is why the European dimension of the External Cultural and Educational Policy should be given even greater consideration' (CDU/CSU & SPD 2018: 156, authors' translation).

With regard to German CD in the US, the 2018-2021 German 'grand coalition' government of Christian and Social Democrats notes: 'To solidify the mutual understanding and trust of future generations, we strive for a more intensive exchange with the US population also beyond the political and economic centers of the USA, and we wish to promote and support institutions that offer a platform for this dialogue' (CDU/CSU & SPD 2018: 149, authors' translation). A specific regional strategy for North America is defined by the German national cultural institute, the Goethe-Institut, in concert with the Foreign Ministry. In the US context the Goethe-Institut also tends to underline the importance of European cooperation (Interview 5) and the potential of a 'united Europe' as a partner for US society (Goethe-Institut 2018a).

The *United Kingdom* has a strong record when it comes to the use of culture in diplomacy, most notably through the British Council (BC), which is often perceived as the model for international cultural relations and education cooperation worldwide. With the BC operating 'at arm's length', that is, largely autonomously from government intervention, the central CD strategy at the governmental level has been shifting over the past decade. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) reviewed its public diplomacy strategy in 2002 and 2005, each time resulting in calls for stronger government steering. The reviews have led to a partial shift from trust-building, dialogue and exchange-related activities to a stronger emphasis on 'nation-branding' and the promotion of the UK's creative industries, particularly with the 2012 'GREAT Britain' campaign (Pamment 2013: 16).

Notwithstanding close historical ties with the US, the latter does not seem to top the UK's CD priority list. A regional strategy for the Americas was produced for 2013-2014, and indicated as priorities the need to continue to present the BC as an innovative model of public diplomacy to the US, to advance the importance of cultural relations in the eyes of US opinion leaders and decision-makers, to reinforce transatlantic cultural cooperation in major cities beyond Washington, DC, and New York, and to generally expand the network of private partners and funders for activities in the US (BC 2013: 25). Most recently, the BC's 2017-2020 corporate plan only mentions the US once (as priority for the Scottish government), however, and rather seems to emphasize political, development and security

issues, consequently focusing on the Arab world, China, India, Indonesia, Russia and South Africa (BC 2017a: 21, 2).

### *Support*

In *France*, support for cultural diplomacy has traditionally been rather strong, even if financial and human resources dedicated to external cultural relations have decreased in recent decades (Haize 2013). This support is also and in particular valid for the US, which has regularly been a major target of French CD initiatives. For instance, it forms part of five key target countries (alongside China, India, Germany, UK) of the 2015 'Creative France' initiative (Senate 2017: 40). However, this support for CD does not necessarily extend to the European dimension of CD – quite to the contrary, as argued below.

In *Germany*, 'external cultural and educational policy' – embedded into a European context – has long enjoyed solid support as the third pillar of the country's foreign policy, next to 'diplomacy' and 'external economic policy' (Maaß 2015). This is also a valid observation for its CD vis-à-vis the US. In the 2017 report of the German Foreign Ministry on external cultural activities, the US was depicted as 'Germany's most important partner outside of the European Union' and hence a key target of external cultural action (Auswärtiges Amt 2017: 95). This importance is grounded on support across the main parties of the political spectrum, as expressed in the 2018 'grand coalition' government agreement (CDU/CSU & SPD 2018: 149).

For the *United Kingdom*, the fact that the support for cultural engagement in the US does not seem very strong is at least in part a consequence of the British Council's financial structure. Its revenues mainly stem from English-teaching and examinations administered world-wide (e.g. IELTS tests), which represented 60% of its total income in 2016/2017. For the same year, BC income from the whole Americas region was only 5% of its total income (BC 2017b). Nonetheless, the British Council is still one of the central players in the US, especially given the UK's 'special relationship' with the country. It is precisely due to this special tie, but also to the fact that the UK has initiated its withdrawal from the EU, that its support for European CD is not very strong at this point. This being said, the BC has long

been a driver behind the work of EUNIC, and forms of pan-European cultural cooperation can be imagined to persist even after 'Brexit' (Interview 1).

Altogether, the member states show a strong willingness to engage in CD vis-à-vis the US per se, which becomes however weak when it comes to embedding this CD into the EU context.

### **3.3. Capacity for EU external cultural action vis-à-vis the US**

Capacity relies on the institutionalization of CD in the US, the existence of solid human and financial resources and of instruments to pursue CD activities on the ground.

#### **EU level**

##### *Institutionalization*

At the supranational level, EU cultural diplomacy in the US is institutionalized in the EU Delegation to the US, which is among the very few EUDs, along with those in China and Morocco, to have officials who are specifically tasked with cultural affairs.

Other attempts to institutionalize genuinely EU-level CD in the US have been undertaken. In 2014, a Euro-American Foundation was launched to finance EU-US cultural cooperation activities. Currently, it provides support to some existing events like the 'Kids Euro Festival' (Interview 2). In spite of initial expectations, however, the Foundation did not manage to raise sufficient funds for additional activities and stronger financial support to existing ones, and is currently semi-dormant (ibid.). EUNIC has expressed an interest in a potential strengthening of the Foundation's activities, hoping that it could fund some of its initiatives (ibid.).

At this point in time, the EU's capacity for CD vis-à-vis the US remains thus primarily institutionalized in the EU Delegation.



## *Agency*

Agents of EU CD work for the 'press and public diplomacy' section of the EU Delegation. Of the five full-time positions in this section, two are cultural affairs officers (Interviews 1, 2). Their task is to engage with the general public and press to increase knowledge of the EU and support its policies, and also to organize educational and cultural events (EEAS 2018).

The EUD actively engages with the cultural attachés and the press counsellors of the member states embassies in Washington, DC. This includes meetings to discuss how to use and/or refer to the EU in their activities. In this context, and in an attempt to reach broader audiences, the Delegation also tries to tap into the networks of EU member states' consulates across the US, inter alia by persuading them to also communicate on behalf of the EU. As EU backing can sometimes give the consulates a stronger clout as well as the possibility to access additional interlocutors in local contexts, they tend to be willing to cooperate with the EUD (Interview 2).

The EUD also has observer status in the EUNIC local clusters across the US (ibid.).

## *Means and instruments*

When it comes to the means of EU-level CD vis-à-vis the US, the public diplomacy remit is broad, including access to grant programs and service contracts, but also funding for events and mobility (Interview 2). A key source is the 'Getting To Know Europe' program, funded under the Partnership Instrument. Its 2015-2017 call operated with a total indicative amount of €1.5 million (Delegation of the EU to the US 2015). It financed 16 very diverse cultural projects, run by universities as well as Friends of Goethe, the American Film Institute and the Ecologic Institute (EEAS 2018). The 2017-2019 call amounted to €1 million, which were awarded to five grantees including three universities, the Old Town School of Folk Music to organize a biennial 'EuroFest' in Chicago, and again the Ecologic Institute (Delegation of the EU to the US 2016; 2018), which signals the centrality of climate and sustainability issues in the EU-level CD.

In terms of other instruments employed by EU-level CD vis-à-vis the US, a number of cultural events and initiatives in Washington, DC, New York and elsewhere have been organized and supported by the EUD over the past decades. As the longest-standing EU-level initiative, the 'European Union Film Showcase', organized by the American Film Institute in partnership with the EUD, presented 44 European films from 27 member states during its 30<sup>th</sup> edition in 2017 (EEAS 2018). An annual 'Kids Euro Festival' started in 2007 to progressively become one of the largest cultural festivals for children in the country. Organized in cooperation with American arts associations, libraries and schools, it comprises various activities like movie screening, live performances and workshops provided by EU member states and cultural institutions (ibid.). Particularly relevant and including numerous events proposed in cooperation with US organizations and venues, a 'European Month of Culture' takes place every year in May in Washington. These events revolve around 'Europe Day' and include a flagship event called 'EU Open House', which involves both the EUD and the EU-28 countries' embassies opening their doors to the public with arts exhibitions, film screenings, food tasting and similar events (Fisher 2014: 20). Beyond the Washington area, the EUD also showcases European music, technology and gastronomy at events such as 'South by Southwest', one of the world's largest creative gatherings taking place in Austin, Texas (EEAS 2018). Finally, social media also plays an increasing role in the EUD's public (including cultural) diplomacy, especially Facebook and Twitter (Interview 2).

While not extensive, resources for EU-level CD vis-à-vis the US exist. They are used via a variety of tools and toward different audiences, indicating an overall capacity that is medium. EU-level CD tends to primarily take the form of culture for diplomacy aimed at promoting other external policy objectives while also displaying signs of diplomacy for culture.

## Level of coordinated EU action

### *Institutionalization*

When it comes to their institutionalized presence in the US, EU member states can benefit from an embassy which engages in public and cultural diplomacy activities and/or the presence of one or more branches of their national cultural institutes (France and Germany have both). Where the coordination of their action is only very loosely institutionalized in the three EUNIC local clusters in the US, those EU members with smaller cultural capacities desire the creation of a stronger overarching umbrella organization such as the 'European Culture Houses' that were proposed in the 2016 Joint Communication (EC & High Representative 2016: 13-14; Interview 1). The big member states, among them Germany, France and the UK, have so far not been actively supporting this form of 'communitarized institutionalization' in a country like the US, which is why to date it has not materialized.

### *Agency*

The commitment to the EUNIC clusters' activities and their scope vary greatly across the 105 existing clusters in 81 countries. Also within each cluster, different levels of engagement among members have been reported (McIntosh 2015). As most cultural institutes' mandates do not foresee the promotion of Europe, their staff are often not formally expected to engage in EUNIC activities, and are therefore left with a high degree of discretion in this respect (Interview 3). These global trends are also observable in the US, where the staff of cultural institutes participate in joint activities on a voluntary basis, and in addition to their full-time positions (Interviews 1, 3). Regular participants in meetings have been the Goethe-Institut, the Austrian Cultural Forum, British Council and the Irish, Finnish and Spanish embassies, whereas the Hellenic Foundation, Portugal's Instituto Camões, the Italian Cultural Institute and the Danish, Romanian, Slovenian and Swedish embassies have shown some support (Fisher 2014: 20). Proposals for employing a person with the specific task of running a local secretariat in Washington have not yet materialized (Interview 1).

While the three US EUNIC clusters in New York, Washington, DC, and Chicago are thus relying on the voluntarism of its members, the EU Delegation has attempted to support

them – notably in Washington – by offering coordination. As in other countries, the press and media team of the EUD organizes monthly meetings with EU cultural institutes and officers from member state embassies charged with culture (Smits et al. 2016: 63; Interview 4). However, some EUNIC members are very sensitive when it comes to protecting their autonomy – not just from the EU, but also from interventions by their own country's embassy (Interview 3).

Altogether, the high degree of discretion left to cultural institutes and embassies' cultural attachés concerning cooperation within the EU framework and the lack of dedicated human resources have rendered the development of a structured and resource-efficient approach rather intricate. At times, coordination may function, at other moments it is dormant (Interview 2).

### *Means and instruments*

EUNIC funds are generally rather limited in nature, and most joint activities between European cultural institutes rely on ad hoc funding from single members, other national bodies or external actors. A EUNIC Cluster Fund was created in 2012 by member contributions to further support cluster activities, and it has operated through yearly calls. This fund amounted to a mere €112,000 and €127,000 in 2016 and 2017 (EUNIC Global 2017). While all three EUNIC clusters in the US have applied for support from the Cluster Fund, only the Washington cluster has been successfully awarded funding (EUNIC Global 2016, 2017).

Despite these structural weaknesses also affecting EUNIC in the US, multiple joint activities have been undertaken in recent years. On top of several one-off events like conferences addressing the role of culture and arts in Europe and in transatlantic relations (e.g. Istituto Italiano di Cultura 2016), EUNIC clusters in Washington, DC, New York and Chicago have organized some recurrent initiatives and projects. Examples of yearly events include EUNIC New York co-presenting the 'Panorama Europe Film Festival' in cooperation with the American Museum of the Moving Image (Museum of the Moving Image 2016) and organizing the 'New Literatures from Europe Festival', running since 2003 (New Literatures

from Europe 2018). In Washington, DC, a 'EUNIC Concert Series' has been organized to promote emerging European artists (Austrian Cultural Forum 2016). Structured projects include the EU and EUNIC-funded 'European Creative Placemaking in Baltimore' dealing with the revitalization of decayed urban areas in the US and the EU, which in 2013 received €7,000 from the Cluster Fund (EUNIC Global 2016). Another recent example is the project 'Plurality of Privacy Project in Five-Minute Plays (P3M5)', a transatlantic theatre project organized by the Goethe-Institut and EUNIC Washington. It addresses the value of privacy in the US and Europe. This project was awarded €10,150 from the Cluster Fund, nearly 1/12 of the total yearly envelope worldwide (EUNIC Global 2017). It shows in particular how EU CD attempts to employ culture for the purposes of promoting other policies, data privacy issues being one of the bones of contention in transatlantic relations.

In sum, the means at the disposal of EUNIC clusters in the US are limited. Although they may be interested in EU funding, the EUD has no discretionary funds to allocate, but can only at times provide the clusters (or member states) with in-kind contributions (Interview 2). Apart from financial constraints to the capacity of coordinated activities in the US, which include for instance the impossibility to cover the high costs of travelling artists' visas, cooperation is complicated by the different statuses – and consequently mandates and approaches – of the national cultural institutes. Some are government-run, whereas others enjoy varying degrees of autonomy. As a result, choosing appropriate CD instruments and allocating resources to them in support of an EU-coordinated CD has been challenging. Oftentimes, the most acceptable activities tend to favor a 'diplomacy for culture' approach. All this yields an overall capacity at this coordinated level of EU CD that is rather weak.

### **Member state level**

The size and reach of the German, British and French CD bodies grant them a central role in terms of EU cultural relations. Globally, they have a staff of more than 3.500 and a network of 819 offices in 137 countries for AF, 159 in 98 countries for the Goethe-Institut, and 191 offices in 110 countries for the BC (Smits *et al.* 2016). The presence of the three member states in the US reflects this global clout.

## *Institutionalization*

France's cultural diplomacy is strongly institutionalized in the United States. Apart from the cultural services of its embassy in Washington, DC, its 12 consulates across the country provide an active cultural outreach, with cultural counsellors and attachés in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, San Francisco and Washington, DC. Of the two main French CD institutions, the *Institut Français* (IF) and the *Alliance Française* (AF), only the latter is represented in the US. Even if there is no regular IF in the US, a special *Maison Française* at the French Embassy in Washington promotes cultural relations (Embassy of France 2018). Where the IF depends directly on government steering and funding, AF branches are independent. The network of 107 AF makes of the US the country hosting the highest number of AFs in the world. In spite of their mandate to promote French language and culture, AFs strongly insist on their independent status, which includes a legal and financial autonomy from the French government that implies self-financing through language courses (Interview 3). Common actions with the cultural section of the French Embassy are not a priority, and mostly consist of an annual event hosted in the Embassy's premises and organized by AF Washington, nor is common action in an EU context (ibid.). When it comes to further attempts at institutionalizing French CD in the US, bodies like the foundation 'French-American Cultural Exchange' (FACE) deal with education and arts projects, occasionally in cooperation with the French Embassy and US authorities (see FACE Foundation 2018).

Similar to France, *Germany* disposes of a well-institutionalized CD in the US. It relies on a unit in charge of culture at the German Embassy, a 'German Information Center USA' in Washington, DC, eight consulates in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and San Francisco, as well as six branches of the Goethe-Institut in Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco and Washington, DC. These institutes are independent of governmental control, but operate broadly within the framework of the German CD strategy (Interview 4) and are partly funded by the Embassy (Interview 5). Besides official Goethe-Instituts, other affiliated organizations ensure a broader reach, also in geographical terms. Examples include Friends of Goethe, a non-

profit and therefore tax-deductible organization involving a broader network of actors in support of German cultural activities, or the German Cultural Center in Atlanta (Goethe-Institut 2018b).

When it comes to the *United Kingdom*, the British Council is the main institutionalized expression of its formal CD presence in the US. Its Country Director for the US serves a dual role, as he is also the Cultural Counsellor for the British Embassy in Washington, DC, and has diplomatic status. The BC used to possess offices in Washington, DC, New York and Los Angeles. However, the last two were closed in 2017 and 2015 respectively, which is why the office now hosted by the British Embassy remains the only official antenna. The activities of the BC in the US also rely on 'Friends of the British Council', a subsidiary undertaking aimed at finding US partners willing to (co-)fund programs for joint cooperation in arts, education, society and English-teaching in the US or anywhere else in the Council's global network (BC 2013: 25). As an example, a 'British Film Office' targeting US film producers was opened in Los Angeles and co-funded by a consortium including the BC (BC 2016: 46).

### *Agency*

All three major EU member states can rely on a solid set of agents pursuing the nationally defined CD objectives, with limited attention however to the European framework into which their action may be embedded. These agents are career diplomats in the embassies, but in the cases of the cultural institutes also locally recruited staff. Especially in the case of *France*, the *Alliance Française* network consists of self-financed entities, each with a local legal status and with mostly local staff (Interview 3). For *Germany*, half a dozen of people work on culture and public diplomacy in the Embassy and the German Information Centre, whereas the Goethe-Instituts have a staff of more than ninety people in the six offices (Goethe-Institut 2018b). In the case of the *United Kingdom*, the BC employs a team of seventeen in the US (BC 2018).

### *Means and instruments*

Cultural diplomacy activities of *France* in the US essentially rely on two types of instruments. The first type involves specific flagship projects with a particular theme and/or target audience such as 'Creative France', which attempts to promote French creative entrepreneurs in five target countries, including the US. It was launched in 2015 with a budget of €8 million (Senate 2017: 40). Other examples of this type of approach are the 'French-American creative lab' and the 'club ICC', both geared towards cooperation in the area of cultural and creative industries (ibid.: 42). The second type comprises the regular activities of the *Alliance Française* network. Its main task is language teaching, but AFs also organized more than 2150 cultural activities in 2016, which mobilized around 6% of their budgets in the US (AF 2017: 50, 69). Activities of big AF like the one in Washington include festivals and expositions on music, cinema, literature, food tastings, debates and more. Sometimes not only French cultural production is displayed, but also that of other francophone countries (AF 2018).

*German CD* involves a variety of instruments in the US, which are related to pure 'nation-branding' and informational work (German Information Centre), dialogue and exchange. Apart from organizing specific events, recent initiatives have included the creation of a 'German Academy New York' as a place of transatlantic exchange, as well as the establishment of a German-American group of scientists at the School of Advanced Studies (SAIS) of the Johns Hopkins University in view of creating a transatlantic think tank (Auswärtiges Amt 2017: 95-96). A recent instrument and its importance are underlined in the 2018 German coalition government agreement: 'We will use the Year of Germany in the US in the years 2018/2019 to reinforce the societal dialogue in all its breadth and to extend the opportunities for contacts' (CDU/CSU & SPD 2018: 149, authors' translation). The 'Year of Germany' provides a means to mobilize public and private actors to make Germany and its culture more visible and 'emotionally experienceable' in the US, and to go beyond the traditional target audiences in the large cities and of Americans with German roots to also address young people and the population of 'heartland America' (Interview 4). In general, while the Goethe-Institut acts in close coordination with the German



Embassy, it is the former that takes on the practical responsibility of a broad set of cultural activities encompassing arts and events addressing social issues (Interview 5; Goethe-Institut 2018b). The Goethe-Institut places emphasis on the use of internet and communication technologies, which allow for a broader reach across the country (ibid.). Particularly relevant is also the Transatlantic Outreach Program (TOP), a public-private partnership involving some major German companies and foundations that has targeted over a thousand US social science teachers and decision-makers in education to inform them about various aspects of modern German society. Moreover, a German-American Partnership Program (GAPP) supports student exchanges through long-term partnerships between schools, mobilizing around 9000 students per year (Goethe-Institut 2018b).

When it comes to the *United Kingdom*, activities of the BC in the US comprise primarily 'nation-branding' and exchange-oriented CD instruments concerning arts, language/education and the use of culture for other policy objectives. In the field of arts, this includes opportunities for cultural actors addressing societal challenges as well as traditional showcasing of UK arts and facilitation of British artists' outreach (BC 2018). Although language teaching is not a key activity in the US, the BC's strong experience with education is used at multiple levels with regard to a transatlantic policy dialogue, collaborations between universities, support to academic mobility and research on education and cultural topics. Finally, several initiatives link culture to other (foreign) policy purposes, targeting for instance issues related to citizenship, youth, diversity and inclusion. For these purposes, the BC was able to obtain third-party (including EU) funding. For instance, the 2013-2020 project 'Bridging Voices' created multi-level transatlantic policy dialogues on the role of religion in society and was funded by the Henry Luce Foundation with USD 950,000 (ibid.). Also, the European Commission financed a €300,000 project on 'Bridging Transatlantic Voices' via the Partnership Instrument for 2015-2018 to promote civil society dialogue on countering violent extremism (ibid.).

Altogether, member states' capacity for CD in the US are not negligible – the extent to which their actual activities take into account the objectives of EU CD is however for the time being rather weak.

### 3.4. Acceptance of EU cultural action in and by the US

Assessing the effects of EU CD is a challenging task. In general, studies attempting to establish the impact of soft power activities are rare and regularly inconclusive (see, however, Singh & MacDonald 2017). They often draw on either audience measurement or broad surveys. Against this backdrop, this section provides only a brief discussion aimed at contextualizing its willingness and capacity by hinting at the acceptance of the EU as a (cultural) actor in the US, bearing in mind that EU external engagement around culture in the US pursues multiple objectives, related to being recognized as an entity per se ('culture for diplomacy': culture for the sake of EU-branding), as an entity in specific policy domains ('culture for diplomacy': culture for the sake of external policies) and for its culture ('diplomacy for culture'). To do so, it draws on interviews and existing survey material on public and elite perceptions of the EU in general and its cultural action in particular (Public Policy and Management Institute *et al.* 2015).

#### *Public acceptance*

Attempts are made by European and member state institutions to measure the audience reach of their cultural activities. This assessment mostly relies on the number of people impacted (Interview 2). For example, the EUD produces a monthly audience engagement scorecard. Also among member states, measures related to attendance and interactions are most common. In 2016-2017, the BC estimated its 'direct engagement', including 'face-to-face interactions, exhibitions and through social media and digital learning', in the whole Americas region as 3.6 million people, which is less than in any other region of the world (BC 2017b: 6, 17). In the case of France, the 2,150 activities organized by the AF network in 2016 reached roughly 230,000 participants. Concerning language courses, AF counted the US as the fifth country by number of students in its French language courses (24,449 people in 2016), and New York as the 14th AF by number of students worldwide and the first one in terms of revenues (AF 2016: 45, 51, 69). Similarly, Goethe-Institut counted 11,228 language course participants, 9684 exam participants and 22,278 library visits in North America in 2016, numbers which lag behind most other regions of the world (Goethe-Institut 2017: 109).

A 2014/15 survey on the perceptions of the EU and its policies by the US public (Public Policy and Management Institute *et al.* 2015) shows an overall positive perception of European culture and lifestyle, most commonly concerning fields like historical heritage, arts and food and less importantly cinema, music and sports. These perceptions of 'European' culture heavily depend on the images the US public has of different member states, however, with Italy, France, UK and Germany topping the list in terms of attractiveness for the US public (*ibid.*: Annex III 116). Bigger member states are easily recognizable, often export many cultural products and mostly have stronger diaspora ties with the US than smaller countries.

These positive perceptions of 'Europe' among the US public stand in contrast to the fact that the EU itself is hardly recognized as a (cultural) actor. When asked to associate the topic of 'culture and sports' with either the 'EU' or 'Europe', only 13.4% of the respondents to the survey picked the EU, while 38.3% indicated 'Europe', 23.6% stated that there is no difference between them and 24.6% could not answer the question (*ibid.*: Annex III 114). Furthermore, when comparing 'politics', 'economy', 'social development', 'science, research and technology' and 'culture and sports', the latter is the topic least often associated with the EU – far behind 'economy', for instance. This signals a clear untapped potential for EU action: the attractiveness of European culture as such does not seem to be translated into any recognizable role for the EU as a cultural actor. In fact, the EU is not wholly unknown as an institution in general – when compared to that of international organizations and non-EU countries, EU visibility ranked relatively well, similarly to India and Brazil (*ibid.*: 237) – but it seems to be less visible particularly in the field of culture.

It is worth noting, however, that even the existing potential for acceptance of EU cultural action should not be taken for granted. In fact, in comparative perspective, US citizens' attraction to Europe is mostly below the average of the EU's ten strategic partner countries. For instance, when asked whether the EU should be engaged more actively in cultural exchanges with their country, only 21.1% of US respondents strongly agreed (29.5% globally), 30.1% agreed (40.5%), with 27.5% undecided (18.5%), 16.7% unable to answer (7.6%) and a higher-than-average percentage explicitly disagreeing, namely 4.7%

(3.9%) (ibid: Annex III 100). Also, when ranking activities related to the EU or Europe that they would be interested in, cultural events were indicated by only 34.2% of US respondents (43.6% globally), European Film festivals by 15.9% (28.4%), academic exchanges by 17% (30.2%) and people-to-people activities by 25.2% (38.2%) (ibid: Annex III 125).

### *Elite acceptance*

Acceptance of EU CD must also be established with respect to intellectual and political elites, which form particular targets of EU external cultural action. A small elite survey conducted in 2014/2015 suggests a high appreciation of the EU's role in culture among US elites (Public Policy and Management Institute *et al.* 2015). Events like European film festivals or Europe Day in Washington, DC, are described as particularly well-received. Also, smaller member states' events targeting diaspora represent a successful strategy to reach out to local audiences (ibid.: 248). However, similarly to the public, elites also seem to perceive the EU primarily as an economic and particularly trade actor (ibid.: 242). Also when it comes to creating close ties with US government and administration around culture, EU-level approaches have proved harder to develop. Whereas political and administrative elites in many (smaller) developing countries are very much prepared to work with the EU as a collective entity, in highly developed and bigger countries like the US they often prefer to address European countries individually (Interview 1).

Altogether, US perceptions of European culture indicate a solid potential for EU CD. However, culture is predominantly associated with 'Europe' as a geographical and historical entity, whereas the recognition of the EU as an actor in general and particularly as a cultural actor remains weak to very weak – providing a plausible indication that EU CD has not been living up to its potential so far.

## 4. The shape of contemporary EU cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US: explaining its 'diversity without unity'

This section extracts key patterns from the above analysis to provide a clear understanding of the current state of the EU's CD vis-à-vis the US, before attempting to explain why the EU engages with the US through CD, and why it does so in the ways revealed by this analysis.

First, the willingness to engage in EU CD varies considerably across the three levels (and the three member states). At the EU level, clear-cut targets and solid support for EU activity yield a strong form of willingness. The latter is more limited but still present at the level of coordinated action. While the target-setting and strategic discussions regarding a coordinated EU CD approach are still ongoing, and while not all member states support EUNIC action in the US, a group of policy entrepreneurs is clearly in favor of stronger collaboration at this level. At the member state level, the willingness to support EU CD is weak, especially in the French case, but also for a UK that is in the process of leaving the EU, while Germany at least acknowledges the European framework of its actions, and the Year of Germany provides opportunities for pan-European activities.

Second, when it comes to the capacity for EU CD, at the EU level the EUD crystallizes all efforts and has resources to pursue a set of activities which are partially about showcasing EU culture per se but mostly about employing culture for other (foreign) policy purposes. The types of activities undertaken at the EU level could therefore primarily be understood as 'culture for EU diplomacy', that is, culture is used as a vehicle to brand the EU while pursuing cooperation on other EU foreign policy priorities, ranging from climate change and energy to security and trade issues, even if some 'diplomacy for European culture' forms of action are also undertaken. Mostly, however, the promotion and display of the diversity of European cultures is left to the level of coordinated activities and to the member states. At the former level, the capacity to pursue concerted cultural action that would genuinely promote EU cultural diversity via a 'diplomacy for culture' approach championed by some of the national cultural institutes exists, but remains weak due to a

limited degree of institutionalization combined with the absence of dedicated staff and no particular means. At the member state level, the capacity to co-promote EU CD would in theory be strong(er), but is – due to the described lack of willingness – currently largely unused. At this level, activities combine nation-branding and support to diplomacy (‘culture for diplomacy’) with limited efforts of ‘diplomacy for the promotion of national culture’.

All in all, the extent of EU CD is (moderate to) high only at the EU level itself, but low at the other two levels: at the level of coordinated action the capacity is weak above all due to a lack of resources, but this capacity is used as much as possible; at the member state level, a generally strong capacity for EU CD exists, but it remains unused due to a lack of willingness to frame national CDs within a European context (which also has negative spill-over effects for EUNIC). While a multi-level and multi-actor EU cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US thus exists (see Table 2), it currently embodies ‘diversity without unity’, remaining incoherent and thus ultimately weaker than it could be. The most resourceful EU member states are each rather strongly engaged in the US, but they clearly favor the ‘national route’ of CD, and their engagement at times features signs of competition rather than forms of coordination and attempts at embedding national CDs into an overarching EU context.

**Table 2: The extent and forms of EU multi-level cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US**

	European Union level	Level of coordinated action	Member state level
<b>Willingness to engage in EU CD</b>	Strong	Medium	Weak
<b>Capacity to engage in EU CD</b>	Medium	Weak	Weak (used capacity)
<b>Extent of EU CD</b>	(Moderate to) high	Low	Low
<b>Dominant form of (EU) cultural diplomacy</b>	(EUropean) culture(s) for the sake of other EU external policy objectives	(Coordinated) diplomacy for European culture(s)	Culture for the sake of nation-branding (UK: culture for the sake of other external policies)

These findings call for an explanation. First, the decision to engage in CD vis-à-vis the US is – at EU and member state level – supported by policy entrepreneurs who seem to be motivated by both interests and normative motivations. Clear indicators for an interest-

driven behavior are many of the activities aimed at EU-/nation-branding and ultimately soft power projection following a competitive mind-set. However, there are – to a lesser extent – also genuine attempts at engaging in a dialogue and exchange aimed at cooperation with (cultural actors in) the US such as some of the measures proposed within the framework of the ‘Year of Germany 2018/19’. While an instrumental and interest-oriented use of culture thus prevails, additional motivations supported by other constituencies, especially the cultural institutes, also drive EU CD vis-à-vis the US. This pattern of co-existing motivations confirms findings of earlier research on EU CD in general (Schunz 2018).

Where a combination of motivations may explain why there is EU CD in the broad sense at all in the US, these motives do not account for the current shape of that CD. The specific rationale of that activity, as expressed in its dominant forms, seems to be different across levels. The EU-level action is focused on using culture for advancing non-cultural policy-related external policy objectives; the coordinated activity – to the extent that it exists – primarily promotes cultural policy objectives; the member states follow above all a nation-branding rationale. While all this activity could be perceived as complementary, it exposes an evident lack of coherence. It suggests above all that, although this is not explicitly acknowledged by actors in the field, there is no real interest among EU member states to cooperate within an EU context. One may even observe, at least in the case of some member states, that they perceive themselves to be in competition with each other. Despite the strategic debates around the 2016 Joint Communication and the Global Strategy’s idea of producing ‘joined-up’ EU external action also in a field like culture, and despite all coordinating efforts offered by the EUD in Washington, DC, and through EUNIC Global, several member states display a tendency to rather ‘go it alone’. This seems to be particularly the case since the Trump administration, with its rhetoric despising the EU, has taken office. While lip-service is being paid to the EU’s efforts, and while events which are mutually beneficial to all are regularly organized, such concerted efforts remain the exception rather than the rule. A latent mind-set of intra-EU competition for ‘spheres of influence’ in the US (Davis Cross & Melissen 2013: xix) thus adds to the constraints that the legal competence already imposes on EU-level CD alongside the particular challenges that

the US as a target country poses. Together, a combination of a legal framework protecting the member states' sovereignty, the latter's attitudes geared towards the promotion of national interests and the intricacies of an attractive, but large and diverse target country may thus explain the current fragmentary nature of EU CD.

## Conclusion

This contribution explored the EU's transatlantic CD to find that a complex, multi-level, multi-actor, multi-faceted and multi-purpose EU cultural diplomacy vis-à-vis the US currently exists, which displays 'diversity without unity' and faces severe incoherencies.

As could be expected, the EU Delegation to the US seems to be most willing to pursue EU CD. Within the limits of its resources and legal constraints, it mostly promotes '(EU) culture for EU diplomacy' purposes, while also attempting to coordinate the work of the EU cultural institutes and embassies in the US. Nevertheless, the extent of EU CD at the level of coordinated activities between the EU and the member states as well as at the member state level remains low. While a certain number of actors – both from the EU and from some of the (especially less resourceful) member states – seem willing to pursue concerted EU CD via EUNIC, and share the understanding that this should take the form of 'diplomacy for European culture(s)', the commitment remains often rhetorical. Resources are scarce, and activities remain ad hoc and limited. This also has to do with the fact that the member states themselves, and notably the most resourceful ones, still primarily pursue national objectives. Rather well-endowed in terms of resources, and often with a network of consulates and cultural institutes across the US, their primary task and activity is to employ culture for nation-branding purposes. Despite their capacity to more strongly include the EU dimension in their CD efforts, the willingness to embed their national CD into a European context to pursue a co-created 'national (and EU) culture for national (and EU) diplomacy' approach is uneven, and mostly limited. This has an observably negative effect on the level of coordinated action, despite the fact that the cultural institutes within



EUNIC are to varying degrees independent of their government. Overall, the extent of EU transatlantic CD is thus at best moderate at this point in time.

This finding can be explained primarily with a latent competition between member states. While the general motivation to engage in CD can be interest or value-driven – and is in the case of EU CD vis-à-vis the US arguably both – it is undeniable that the interest-driven soft power competition that is often taken as a key incentive for actors to engage in CD activities *at all* (Schunz 2018) plays out negatively inside the EU in a country like the US. Especially the larger member states are – to differing degrees – in the first place interested in employing culture as a vehicle to project a positive image, without necessarily portraying themselves as part of the greater ensemble that is the EU. This distinguishes the US as a target country from smaller and developing countries, where the preparedness to effectively cooperate their diplomatic action around culture among EU members seems generally higher (Interview 1, see also McIntosh 2015: 23). Member states' lacking willingness and legal competence constraints thus lead to a situation in which the undeniable potential for concerted European transatlantic cultural diplomacy remains unused. These shortcomings of joint EU cultural diplomacy are reflected in its acceptance by the US public and elites. Despite positive perceptions of European culture as such, the EU does not seem to be recognized as an actor in the field of culture, which hampers its chances to capitalize on these assets.

These findings may have to be interpreted with a degree of caution, as the EU's CD is generally rapidly evolving and studies of its impact are scarce. Further research would be needed to confirm the observed trends, notably by comparing more member states' CD in the US, systematically contrasting EU transatlantic CD with its CD in other developed (e.g. Japan), emerging (e.g. China) and developing countries. More significant efforts – beyond those undertaken by the EU CD actors themselves, which mostly focus on audience-tracking – should also be undertaken to measure the effectiveness of EU CD in, and its acceptance as an actor by, the US.

To improve the EU's standing in the US and unleash its undeniable potential, eliminating inefficiencies and becoming more effective and joined-up in line with the objectives of the 2016 EU Global Strategy, several steps could be taken. Just like in EU foreign policy in general, the resources available in the US could be used in a more synergetic fashion. This would presuppose overcoming zero-sum thinking: adding the EU as a layer to their national cultural diplomacies – and thus signaling their belonging to a broader supranational structure meriting to be advanced as an emerging cultural space on its own – would not take anything away from the member states. On the contrary, a strategic approach to communicating Europe that has to involve all EU and member state cultural actors in the US, and which provides unity on a selected number of cultural themes and priorities while otherwise allowing for diversity, would create a win-win situation. This would help the EU to build upon its image of a promoter of cultural diversity. To achieve such an outcome, member states' willingness is the central resource. Many synergies could be reaped via better coordination within the limits of currently available resources. Additionally, however, financial incentives in order to fund joint projects might be helpful, but difficult to realize, as even the agreement between EUNIC and Commission Services/the EEAS does not explicitly foresee a shared use of funds.

Greater efforts at developing joined-up EU CD would be more than a drop in the bucket. They would benefit the image of the EU and of each of its member states, promote European culture(s) and cultural actors, and possibly advance EU foreign policy objectives more generally. They would also help portray the EU for what it is: a multicultural player cherishing 'unity in diversity' and openness. This would serve to remind Americans that they, too, form a society that takes pride in its diversity, and which strongly supported the creation of the supranational EU, whose prospering has been and continues to be in their interest.

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## Interviews

**Interview 1:** European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC). Brussels. Director of the EUNIC Global Office. Skype interview. 15 November 2017.

**Interview 2:** Delegation of the European Union to the United States. Washington, DC. Senior Policy Officer. Phone interview. 8 December 2017.

**Interview 3:** Alliance Française. Washington, DC. Executive Director. Phone interview. 14 February 2018.

**Interview 4:** Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United States. Washington, DC. Senior Cultural Attaché. Phone interview. 22 February 2018.

**Interview 5:** Goethe-Institut. Washington, DC. Director of Information Services North America. Skype interview. 28 February 2018.



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