Working paper

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EU Cultural Diplomacy in the MENA region:

a qualitative mapping of initiatives promoting regional cooperation

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Contents

List of recurring acronyms

AFAC	Arab Fund for Arts and Culture
ALECSO	Arab League Educational, Culture and Sciences Organisation
ALF	Anna Lindh Foundation
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
CBC	Cross Border Cooperation
CD	Cultural Diplomacy
CoE	Council of Europe
COPEAM	Conférence Permanente de l'Audiovisuel Méditerranéen
CS	Civil Society
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
EC	European Commission
ECLASLO	European Commission-LAS Liaison Office
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EMUNI	Euro-Mediterranean University
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EuroMeSCo	Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GPGC	Global Public Goods and Challenges
LAS	League of Arab States
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
PA-UfM	Parliamentary Assembly - Union for the Mediterranean
RMSU	Regional Monitoring and Support Unit
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNU-CRIS	United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies

Summary

Drawing upon the analytical tools defined in the inception paper[1] for Work package 5 of the EL-CSID project, this paper assesses the *willingness, capacity* and *acceptance* sustaining EU broadly-defined Cultural Diplomacy (CD) in the MENA region. The resulting qualitative mapping focuses on policies and initiatives which foster regional cooperation, both around the Mediterranean and among southern countries. The use of cultural tools in EU relations with the Arab world and Israel has received widespread commitment, based on its potential to foster peaceful relations, create opportunities for development and possibly lead towards a convergence of civilisations. The EU and its partners have started to create the conditions for CD initiatives to take place within most regional and inter-regional fora for cooperation with the MENA. This is true within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, although resources are still insufficient and rely on short-termed instruments. Even more needs to be done to endow the recent political commitment to EU-GCC, EU-Maghreb and EU-LAS cultural cooperation with actual tools for action. Post-Arab Springs MENA countries constitute a fertile ground for EU CD initiatives, despite the difficulties presented in some of them by non-cooperative stances of national authorities and restrictive cultural policies. In this context, the EU is adopting an approach valuing capacity building, intercultural dialogue and people-to-people contacts instead of pure display of European culture(s), but it still needs to clearly define what the use of the term Cultural Diplomacy means in its particular case. More specifically, a regional strategy for Cultural Diplomacy in the MENA is still missing.

Introduction

Recent analyses of the impact of EU policies on regional integration in the Mediterranean and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have underlined the little progress made in the past decades, depicting an uncertain outlook, especially in terms of South-South cooperation[2]. While this can hardly be contested, official reports often pay insufficient attention to the role of culture[3], both when analysing current developments in regional cooperation and in terms of recommendations for future policies. Culture as a drive for regional cooperation is often neglected, while it holds a strong potential in the development of pluralistic 'Security Communities'[4], where common identities, values and practices make dependable expectations of peaceful change possible. This collective learning process is based both on the creation of narratives sustaining common norms and principles which are acceptable across cultures, as well as on the spreading of practices like those pertaining to rule of law and democracy[5]. The difficult 'convergence of civilisations' in the context of Euro-Mediterranean relations needs 'thick social communication between civil society members and social networks'[6], which has been supported by EU programmes and policies in the past decades. These instruments make use of cultural cooperation not only in a narrow sense of 'cultural events' – like theatre and music festivals or showcasing of national cultural products (ascribable to Cultural Diplomacy in a traditional sense) –, and more often support capacity building and inter-cultural dialogue at many levels.

EU programmes and policies define a broad idea of the use of culture in external relations, which would clash with a strict definition of Cultural Diplomacy (CD) as a state-driven process of display and showcasing, definable as 'the accrual by nation-states of symbolic capital through the placing of their ideas and cultural properties in the global economy of prestige'[7]. Cultural Diplomacy is a concept which has often been overstretched, becoming a buzz-word for intercultural dialogue and cooperation, thus focusing more on people-to-people contacts than government agency[8]. The EU has also made a rather unclear use of this term. First, by opting for the broader concept of 'culture in external relations'[9]. More recently, adding to this phrasing the idea of Cultural Diplomacy as one of the pillars to advance an EU Strategy for international cultural relations[10], but using it as a concept encompassing at least two dimensions. On the one hand, complementarity and cooperation with EU Member States initiatives (often consisting in traditional cultural display). On the other hand, actions financed by EU programmes for the inclusion of cultural operators an d broader civil society (CS), support to mobility and intercultural dialogue, informal and formal education initiatives and training in cultural activities.

As the mapping and analytical exercise carried out by this paper suggests – despite the effort to coordinate EU Member States' initiatives through tools like the EUNIC Network –, the second dimension represents the bulk of what Cultural Diplomacy means for the EU in terms of resources and efforts invested. Nonetheless, it should be stated that this is particularly true in the context of this work which: (1) focuses on the *regional dimension* (Euro-Mediterranean and region-to-region) of EU cultural engagement with

its Southern Neighbours, analysing mostly EU-level initiatives rather than member states' ones; (2) represents a case study on the crises-ridden MENA region, where intercultural dialogue, capacity building and people-to-people exchanges aimed at fostering mutual understanding have been developed as an absolute priority, at least in official narratives. Using the term Cultural Diplomacy for such a broad set of activities might be criticised as yet another overstretched interpretation, watering down its original meaning. However, diplomatic goals and 'agency' in EU external cultural relations cannot be judged with the same standards used for a state. The EU does not have cultural institutes or cultural posts in delegations to charge with typical CD tasks and to endow with human and financial resources. In its external cultural relations, the EU mostly makes use of funding programmes which either assign grants to cultural projects presented by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), or organise activities at the programme level – often involving stakeholders in the target countries in all phases from design to implementation. There is EU agency in this, but local cultural operators are also actively involved and invited to interact with each other through capacity building events, workshops, networking and the creation of consortia.

Also, in terms of analysis, it would be impossible to assess culture as a separate policy field. Culture is a transversal topic, and initiatives in fields like civil society and youth – which partly address culture –, do not appear in EU figures for cultural actions[11]. This further supports the broad understanding of EU *Cultural* Diplomacy chosen for this work.

When looking at the policy documents analysed in this paper – but most importantly at the resources allocated and the initiatives developed by the EU –, two main roles for culture in EU relations with the MENA region (and arguably with other politically volatile developing countries) emerge. First, the role of culture and intercultural dialogue in building peaceful relations between people. Second, the idea that culture has an economic, social and political value which leads to development in these three fields. Both points can be related to EU support for the existence of a security-development nexus[12], suggesting that sustainable development contributes to the creation of a 'common area of peace, stability and prosperity' and vice-versa. Cultural dialogue in the Mediterranean, and particularly the third chapter of the Barcelona process (partnership in social, cultural and human affairs), have been established and implemented with security goals in mind. The last Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Culture, held in 2008, called for a 'fully-fledged Euro-Mediterranean Strategy on Culture, encompassing cooperation in both the dialogue between cultures and cultural policy' and generally highlighted the importance of cultural dialogue as a tool for the promotion of democracy and human rights, de-radicalisation and conflict prevention rather than an end in itself[13].

This paper, written in the context of the EU-funded project European Leadership in Cultural, Science and Innovation Diplomacy (EL-CSID) assesses EU broadly-defined Cultural Diplomacy policies and initiatives in the MENA region and their potential in North-South and South-South regional cooperation. In part, the work analyses initiatives supporting regional cooperation and integration

with a Euro-Mediterranean character, which represents the main – albeit not exclusive –, focus of institutions like the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) or Euromed regional programmes. Also, inter-regionalism and region-to-region cooperation are assessed, by understanding these concepts as the tendency of the EU to approach MENA countries as a region (i.e. through the League of Arab States or thematic platforms/networks) or to interact with its sub-regions (e.g. Maghreb, Gulf States). These inter-regional interactions take place both in the framework of bilateral agreements and within multilateral organisations and fora like the UfM. Finally, it is enquired whether the EU supports the creation of networks of cooperation including MENA countries, for example among cultural operators in the framework of Euromed programmes.

The research draws upon the analytical tools defined in the inception paper[14] for Work package 5 of the EL-CSID project, led by the United Nations Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), which proposes the qualitative indicators of *willingness, capacity* and *acceptance* to assess the effectiveness of EU policies in the field. These are broken down into sub-indicators, which are organised in sub-sections[15]. The analysis starts by gauging the *willingness* (1) of the EU to engage in regional Cultural Diplomacy. This is first done by looking at official policies, seeking for the expression of general commitment to Cultural Diplomacy vis-à-vis the MENA region (1.1) and successively paying attention to regional (1.1.1) and inter-regional (1.1.2) aspects. *Willingness* is also assessed by looking at the presence of committed leaders at the EU level (1.2), who are in favour of the use

of CD tools towards the MENA region. In the following section (2), *capacity* is initially discussed by presenting EU efforts in selecting and training cultural operators in the region to pursue its policy goals (2.1). The bulk of the *capacity* section provides an analysis of the funding instruments made available by the EU for culture, mainly focusing on those with a regional dimension or which are open to most countries in the region (2.2). The third *capacity* sub-section (2.3) then looks at the establishment of institutions and bodies pursuing broad CD objectives in regional and inter-regional frameworks. The last section of the work (3) moves to analysing *acceptance* of EU initiatives. First (3.1), it is discussed whether recent surveys have found a positive response from MENA citizens to EU involvement in cultural activities, or whether they show interest in getting involved in cultural activities in general. Also, this subsection assesses participation of cultural actors and operators to EU programmes and actions. *Acceptance* and buy-in from national and regional leaders in the MENA are then presented (3.2), briefly reviewing the situation of cultural policies in the region and looking at the involvement of national and regional authorities in EU programmes and initiatives. Finally, broader acceptance of EU CD goals and instruments is discussed (3.3), presenting cooperation with other regional and international organisations in this domain. Some conclusions and policy recommendations close the paper. The use of cultural tools in EU relations with the Arab world and Israel has received widespread commitment, based on its potential to foster peaceful relations, create opportunities for development and possibly lead towards a convergence of civilisations. The EU and its partners have started

to create the conditions for CD initiatives to take place within most regional and inter-regional fora for cooperation with the MENA Region. This is true within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, although resources are still insufficient and rely on short-termed instruments. Even more needs to be done to endow the recent political commitment to EU-GCC, EU-Maghreb and EU-LAS inter-regional cultural cooperation with actual tools for actions. Post-Arab Springs MENA countries constitute a fertile ground for EU CD initiatives, despite the difficulties presented in some of them by non-cooperative stances of national authorities and restrictive policies. In this context, the EU is adopting an approach valuing capacity building, intercultural dialogue and people-to-people contacts instead of pure display of European culture(s), but it still needs to clearly define what the use of the term Cultural Diplomacy means in its particular case. More specifically, a regional strategy for Cultural Diplomacy in the MENA is still missing.

Annex I provides a short selection of EU-funded cultural projects with a relevance to regional cooperation. The limited length of this work does not allow for a thorough, all-encompassing mapping, and some initiatives are inevitably left out, especially in terms of projects.

The qualitative analysis makes use of official sources from the EU institutions and programmes, EU-funded projects, regional and international organisations and other entities. Also, ten semi-structures phone and Skype interviews provide additional insights to the enquiry. These interviews – targeting heads of EU programmes and projects, EU officials, UfM managers and the

directors of the EUNIC network and of the EC-LAS liaison office –, besides being cited in the text, have been fundamental to inform and guide the whole research process. Any errors, omissions or misinterpretation of the information communicated by the interviewees remain the sole responsibility of the author.

1. Willingness

1.1. Inclusion of CD goals in black letter law and policy

Article 128 of the Maastricht treaty conferred for the first time a competence in Culture to the new-born European Union, stating that it should 'encourage cooperation' among member states and 'support their actions'[16] in a field which was still jealously retained by the national level. This legal basis has remained mostly unchanged, with the Lisbon treaty enlisting culture as a field where the EU can 'carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States' (Art. 6). A specific legal basis for CD activities could be particularly deduced by the support the EU can give to the 'improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European peoples', 'non-commercial cultural exchanges' (Art 167.2) as well as in the 'cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the sphere of culture, in particular the Council of Europe' (Art 167.3)[17].

In this framework, the concept of Cultural Diplomacy within EU secondary legislation and policy documents is a relatively recent one, which can

be traced back to the 2007 EC *Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalizing world*[18]. The latter – without explicitly making reference to this term –, set out for the first time clear diplomatic goals for the role of culture in EU external relations, with particular attention to political dialogue, market access, financial a technical support and cultural exchange at all levels[19]. Interestingly, it underlined the need for the EU to address regions apart from targeting individual countries, with an explicit reference to the work of the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership[20].

The specific importance of culture in fostering dialogue and cooperation within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership has been restated multiple times, especially after the 2008 Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Culture in Athens, which laid down the political priorities in this respect. The commitment to Cultural Diplomacy goals was mostly addressed within soft law, starting from political declarations in the intergovernmental framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (see next section), in Council Conclusions[21], Communications[22], European Parliament (EP) resolutions[23], strategies[24] and an ad-hoc Preparatory Action[25]. Nonetheless, EU institutions have failed to produce a comprehensive and coherent strategy or legal framework for broadly defined Cultural Diplomacy, particularly vis-à-vis the Southern Neighbourhood. This is especially true in the context of the 2011 and 2015 ENP reviews which, although underlining a strengthen approach to overlapping concepts like civil society support and people-to-people contacts, barely mentioned the role of culture. A partial compensation for this lack of atten-

tion and commitment has come with the 2016 ad-hoc Communication *Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations*[26] which underlined the importance of cultural dialogue and initiatives with Mediterranean partners, taking stock of ongoing initiatives and committing to future support – but without defining specific strategies for the region.

However, the potential policy impact of this strategy should be assessed in the next years, as priorities will have to be (re)defined according to the new approach defined therein[27]. To date, it would be hard to state that culture represents an absolute priority in EU external relations. As an example of this, most EU delegations have no person specifically charged with culture, which is a topic addressed transversally or mixed with other competences. This is even true at the central level: DG NEAR does not have specific posts for culture, which is normally covered within broader social dialogue and development tasks[28].

1.1.1 Regionalism

In general terms, European support for regional integration in the MENA has counted on the establishment of several instruments in the past decades, and it has been mostly based on economic means and goals, with very little results due to the several political tensions and low economic complementarity and diversification[29] in the region. An historical overview of EU support for the (mostly disappointing) initiatives of MENA regional cooperation is outside the reach of this work, which rather focuses on recent initiatives, particularly regarding culture.

Among others topics, culture officially covers an important chapter of the actions of the UfM, which promotes cultural dialogue and cooperation between the two sides of the Mediterranean, building upon narratives of common history and cultural heritage of the region. Within the UfM framework, culture is a field which has a unique potential to create cooperation and long-lasting ties in the region by overcoming political tensions and obstacles at the governmental level[30]. The third chapter of the Barcelona declaration establishing the Euro-Mediterranean partnership specifically aims at creating a 'partnership in social, cultural and human affairs: developing human resources, promoting understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies'[31]. This work is best represented by the activities of Anna Lindh Foundation, whose explicit mandate is to implement a multifaceted idea of intercultural dialogue between the two sides of the sea[32]. Among the most visible results of UfM initiatives in culture, there have been the establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) in Slovenia in 2008[33] – representing a network which currently implements Higher Education projects, as well as the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean University of Fez in 2012[34]. The most remarkable and coherent initiative in terms of Cultural Diplomacy remains the creation of the Anna Lindh Foundation for the dialogue between cultures in 2004, which is in charge of cultural dialogue initiatives within the UfM, and fosters intellectual, cultural and civil society exchanges, to promote the 'visibility of the Barcelona process'[35]. While the Euro-Mediterranean partnership generally depends on Members States, EU, IFIs and other actors to finance regional projects that are successively 'labelled' by the UfM – the

ALF has its own budget which, inter alia, finances small projects ranging from inclusion of women and youth in Southern Partners' political life, to vocational training and exchange European and Mediterranean artists[36].

The work of the UfM is based on the principle of variable geometry among its members, and its involvement in EU-level strategies in the field is guaranteed by the north-south co-presidency mechanism, which brings together the EU[37] with one Southern Mediterranean country; as well as by the chairmanship or participation of the EU at UfM meetings at all levels. As an illustration of this institutional relationship, the UfM actively took part in the last ENP review. In turn, the EU participated in the preparation of the UfM 2017 Roadmap (see section 1.2)[38]. Nonetheless, the UfM remains a separate institution and UfM/ALF activities run in parallel – and at times cross –, with EU financial and technical tools for CD in the region, which are extensively presented in the next sections.

As an example of the programmes established, the EuroMed process has been supported by the creation of Regional Communication programmes to improve southern civil society understanding of the EU and the partnership, which has now reached its second phase with OPEN Neighbourhood (2015-2019)[39]. Also, three main funding programmes have been established in the past decades to support intercultural dialogue and cooperation, now partly replaced by other regional programmes (see section 2.2). The EUROMED Heritage Programme was established in 1998 and terminated its fourth phase in 2013[40], proposing culture and cultural heritage appropriation as

means to foster understanding between people in the region. A Regional Monitoring and Support Unit (RMSU) provided technical assistance in management and ownership of the projects and fostered regional cooperation among the participants, acting in light of the principles of the Barcelona declaration and dialogue[41]. EUROMED Audiovisual was established in 2000 and terminated its third phase in 2014[42], and was aimed at supporting the audio-visual sector in Southern Mediterranean countries. A RMSU with similar duties was again created and it was charged, among other things, with 'improving and enlarging networks — in order to maximise the programme's impact and ensure sustainability, a reinforced regional and interregional integration, to form the basis for long-term partnerships'[43]. EUROMED Youth was created in 1999 and recently closed its forth phase[44], promoting youth exchanges, voluntary service and training activities among the two sides of the Mediterranean. The programme also started a process of decentralisation of the management and stronger co-ownership, later supported by a Regional Capacity Building and Support Unit providing technical aid to Southern Partners.

As discussed in the next sessions, EU regional programmes have indeed a predominant focus on North-South exchanges and cooperation, but they often require grant applicants to create consortia and develop partnerships across countries. Additionally, they all support networking and capacity building activities which bring together cultural actors from different countries. In doing this, they often rely on pre-existent thematic Arab and Euro-Mediterranean networks, by including them in their activities. However, the

regional character of these programmes is often faced with the social, cultural and political diversity of countries in the region, which not always allows for a one-size-fits-all approach, and can require the redefinition the methods employed[45], sometimes at the detriment of a regional dimension[46]. Furthermore, regional programmes have mostly no structured or continuous interaction with regional organisations like the UfM or, on the southern side, the LAS[47] – and do not necessarily represent pieces of the same coherent strategy.

1.1.2 Inter-regionalism

An explicit mention of the fundamental importance of approaching Southern Partners in inter-regional terms can already be found in the 2004 Commission Communication *ENP Strategy Paper*, which reads: 'In line with the political orientations established in the EuroMed Valencia[48] and Naples[49] Ministerial Conferences, the strategic priorities of regional cooperation in the Mediterranean should be: South-South integration; sub-regional cooperation and the harmonisation of the regulatory and legislative environment'[50]. Nonetheless, it seems evident that this support for regionalism in the South only became one of the multiple approaches of the ENP, which mostly relies on bilateral programmes with each partner country and North-South (to a lesser extent South-South) regional cooperation based on variable geometries, 'rather than seeking the elusive Holy Grail of regional harmony'[51] among Southern Partners.

Nonetheless, the UfM does not propose an exclusive model of Euro-Mediterranean regionalism, but grants the flexibility to support projects

like the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) through the 5+5 dialogue[52], which brings together Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya with Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Malta. The EC also underlined the importance of cultural tools in South-South integration goals in the 2012 *Communication Supporting closer cooperation and regional integration in the Maghreb: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia,* by stressing the role of media and culture to support democratisation[53] and sustainable human, social and economic development[54]. The Communication sets out an important milestone in the EU approach to economic, security and cultural challenges in the area. However, the promising regional project of the AMU has brought to almost no results in more than 25 years of activity and – despite the many cultural ties within the region and the signing of an AMU convention for cultural cooperation in 1992 –, culture made no exception. On the contrary, the attempt to approach the region from the EU has, according to some, brought to a stronger focus on North-South economic relations, and it has made regional integration even weaker[55]. Currently, Maghreb countries do not have a fluent internal dialogue on culture[56], which makes inter-regional cooperation less likely to take place. However, as discussed later, some political will to advance cultural cooperation has been signalled by the recent (and first) 5+5 Culture Ministers Meeting in Malta on the 10th of February 2017 (see section 1.2).

Also, MENA sub-regions have been addressed with several cultural projects funded by EU budget, some of which aimed at developing cooperation of cultural actors within the region, but normally within a stronger framework of EU-Maghreb

exchange. An interesting project on civil society and regional integration is the *Youth mobility and regional integration of Maghreb countries* (2015-2018)[57]. Also, old Erasmus Mundus-funded projects like *Al Fihri, Averroes, Erasmus Mundus Maghreb*, and *Al Idrisi*, have aimed at fostering higher education mobility between the two regions, while also trying to integrate and harmonise Maghreb University systems and to develop capabilities to address regional needs. Other projects financed through the Erasmus Mundus Action 2 Strand 1-Partnership (now Erasmus +) have targeted other sub-regions, more specifically Eastern Mediterranean countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria) in the case of projects such as *AVEMPACE, PHOENIX, HERMES* and *PEACE*; Egypt-Lebanon with projects like ELEMENT, or Gulf countries; and Iran and Iraq with projects like *SALAM, EM IIY* and *EM* Action 2 Gulf Countries. However, the main goal of these projects remains to foster North-South interactions, which leaves a relatively smaller space for regional cooperation among southern countries.

Regarding Gulf Countries, the EU inter-regional approach has been characterised by an almost exclusive focus on economic opportunities and security concerns. The signing of the 1988 EU-GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Cooperation Agreement[58] did not even mention the word 'culture', which could only be partly justified by the fact that limited competences in culture were only acquired by European institutions with the Maastricht treaty. A stronger role for culture and intercultural dialogue in EU-CCG relations was timidly called by the European Parliament in a broader resolution on inter-regional relations in 2011[59]. However, more intense cultural dialogue

and people-to-people contacts could be potentially developed in the near future, as suggested in the 2015 and 2016 EU-GCC Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting Statements[60] and allowed by the 2014-2020 framework programme for cooperation between the two – the Partnership Instrument –, which has among its objectives the promotion of Public Diplomacy and academic cooperation[61]. In practical terms, the *Al Jisr project* (2008-2010) on EU-GCC Public Diplomacy and Outreach Activities has provided grounds for action to the EU Delegation in Riyadh, which also represents the EU to the GCC Secretariat. Through *Al Jisr*, the EU could support – together with European and Gulf Countries-based research institutions –, professional and public knowledge of the EU among CCG citizens as well as dialogue on future inter-regional engagement[62].

On a bigger scale, inter-regional relations have been developed by the EU with the most important regional organisation in the Arab world: the League of Arab States. On an invitation of the EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy and the LAS Secretary-General, an EC-LAS liaison office (ECLASLO) has been created in Malta in 2009 to facilitate cooperation between the two parties. At that time, the LAS demanded further engagement with the EU and felt that other actors like the African Union were being better recognised as partners in multiple policy fields[63]. Before that, strategic bilateral meetings between the EU and LAS had started in Malta in 2008, and the office is a result of the related political momentum. In the same year, the UfM was created, where the EEAS co-chairs and the LAS participates actively[64]. Recent rela-

tions have been based on a Strategic Dialogue created by the Third European Union–League of Arab States Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting in 2014[65]. The latter, although mainly focused on political and security aspects – which represent the bulk of EU-LAS dialogue –, also supported socio-economic and cultural cooperation as a priority, mentioning the protection of cultural heritage, empowerment of women through regional cooperation with the EU and the UN[66], and inter-parliamentary cooperation. To a lesser extent, the declaration following the most recent Euro-Arab ministerial meeting, held in Cairo on 20th of December 2016[67], mentioned culture regarding the protection of cultural rights and the role played by civil society in this respect, also declaring support for social development and condemnation of the destruction of cultural heritage perpetrated by Daesh in Iraq. A good example of EU-LAS intercultural dialogue is represented by the El Hiwar project ('Dialogue', see Annex), fostering training, information and exchanges between EU officials and LAS Secretariat, informing about the functioning and policies of the EU and vice versa and providing technical language training. The project has been proposed by ECLASLO and runs from 2013 to 2017. Interestingly, it has also been used as a platform for other activities, touching inter alia civil society, media and actors working with migration, mediation and gender issues[68]. Also, the EU – together with other organisations including UNESCO – has participated to the creation of frameworks for cooperation with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), notably the International Contact Group on citizenship and human rights education[69]. ALECSO and the EU have also worked together on cultural co-

operation projects like *Umayyad route,* promoting shared cultural heritage in seven Mediterranean countries (see Annex). Most interestingly, the EC and LAS developed an initiative of cooperation in the field of civil society, within the framework of the EU-funded Civil Society Dialogue Network. The network held a meeting named *European Union – League of Arab States cooperation and the EU response to changes in the Arab region: views from civil society* in Malta in June 2013, which brought together CS actors, mostly from MENA, with EU and LAS officials. It provided a CS opinion on challenges in the Arab world and political responses from the two sides[70]. Civil Society participants criticised the EU engagement in the region under several aspects, and asked for more financial and technical support, underlining the importance of cultural projects 'to stimulate exchanges, freedom of expression and inter-cultural dialogue, especially with youth groups'[71]. Occasions for EU-LAS inter-regional interactions are also provided by some Euromed regional programmes (see section 2.2). For instance, the programme MedMedia has supported a campaign to create a Special Rapporteur for Media Freedoms in the Arab World to seat in the LAS, which has however not attracted sufficient attention from the organisation in order to be established[72].

1.2 Presence of committed leaders in the member states and EU institutions

In the post-Lisbon Treaty European Union, the newly institutionalised European Council and the European Commission (formally in charge of legislative initiative) have defined political agendas in a system of 'competitive coopera-

tion' which underlines the importance of both actors in giving impetus to EU policies[73]. However, EU-level cultural policies and initiatives are only marginally addressed in 'high politics' and in the context of compelling priorities discussed by the European Council, and are thus more likely to be transversally determined by the Commission and the decision-making triangle. The EU is only endowed with the competence to support, coordinate or supplement actions of the member states in Culture (Art. 6 TFEU), but cultural initiatives and policies are implemented transversally beyond the work of DG EAC, especially when it comes to EU external relations, where most of the programmes are managed by DG NEAR and DG DEVCO. European Commissioners and other leaders have shown commitment to the concept of Cultural Diplomacy in addressing Southern Partners multiple times. The need for a strategy on Culture in EU external relations was highlighted by a EP resolution in May 2011[74], convincing the Commission to start the so-called Preparatory Action in 2013-2014[75], a report and consultation process mostly conducted by Cultural Institutes and other experts. More recently (January 2016), EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Tibor Navracsics addressed the EP Foreign Affairs Committee on the subject of 'Cultural Diplomacy as an instrument of EU Neighbourhood Policy'. Navracsics committed to the creation of the European strategy for CD, strongly building upon the many programmes cited in this work targeting Mediterranean partners in the field of media and culture, theatrical production, cultural heritage, cultural policy reform and education. Most importantly, he called for a redefinition of the idea of CD, moving from the unilateral display of European (national) excel-

lences to a process based on mutual exchange and co-ownership, so as to 'build long-term relationships based on trust'[76]. Political co-author of the Strategy was the High Representative Federica Mogherini, who presented a European Cultural Diplomacy Platform (se section 2.3) in March 2016 and, the following month, addressed the Culture Forum in Brussels on CD goals. On that occasion, she underlined the role of youth engagement in the Mediterranean and stressed the importance of culture for development, job creation and security[77]. The already mentioned *Strategy for international cultural relations* was issued in June 2016, but it has appeared as more of a 'wrap-up' or existing initiatives, being relatively generic in content and partly overshadowed by the little role for culture identified in the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy presented shortly afterwards[78].

Within the UfM, Euro-Mediterranean meetings of ministers of culture have provided political guidance for cultural cooperation, but have not taken place since 2008. Thus, this role has been left *de facto* to bodies and fora addressing general strategies like the annual gathering of Foreign Ministers of the Union for the Mediterranean as well as bodies dealing with complementary issues like higher education, research and youth. Less formal fora which can give guidance to cultural cooperation include the recent Third Euro-Mediterranean Forum on Intercultural Dialogue[79], which is the largest meeting of institutions and Civil Society actors working on intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean, organised by the Anna Lindh Foundation in Malta in October 2016. The Forum was preceded and prepared in July by a meeting of the main stakeholders, hosted

by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain. Also, the key actors dealing with intercultural and interfaith dialogue had already met in July 2015 at the UfM in a High-Level meeting at the initiative of the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs and in partnership with actors such as the EU, Anna Lindh Foundation and UN Alliance of Civilisations[80]. The participating institutions to the High-Level meeting underlined the need for improved coordination and long lasting strategies, identifying areas of future cooperation and committing to design an Action Plan of activities[81]. A UfM Roadmap for action was endorsed by Foreign Affairs Ministers at the second UfM Regional Forum on 23-24 of January 2017 in Barcelona, and identifies intercultural and interfaith dialogue as a tool to achieve regional stability, human development and security. The Roadmap also foresees a potential future Ministerial conference on Culture. Commitment to regional and sub-regional integration are reiterated, but mostly addressed in economic terms and with a focus on infrastructure, trade and investment and sustainable development. Nonetheless, a general commitment to acting in partnership with the stakeholders working on intercultural dialogue is acknowledged[82].

Support for the activities of the ALF and the UfM in the field has also come from 5+5 Dialogue ministerial meeting in Marseille, although mostly focused on security issues[83]. Most interestingly, the first 5+5 Dialogue Culture Ministers Meeting took place in Malta on the 10th of February 2017, including high-level observers from the Arab Maghreb Union, the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation, the EU and the UfM[84]. The meeting issued a 'Tunis Declaration' endorsing

the launch of a segment on culture for the 5+5 dialogue. The declaration recognised the link between a joint vision based on universal values and further political, social and cultural convergence and even integration in the region. A set of ambitious priorities was endorsed, including: the promotion of common values through ad-hoc policies and initiatives; policy dialogue; mobility of cultural actors; development of cultural and creative industries; support for initiatives in audio-visual, literature, protection of cultural heritage, involvement of civil society and youth based on the experience of actors like ALF and programmes like Creative Europe, and more[85].

In terms of EU Member States support for a European CD, much still needs to be done to reach a coordinated vision. Despite the existence of European cooperation among national Institutes of Culture in the context of the EUNIC Network, a real centralised regional approach is outside of its reach. This partly depends by the nature of EUNIC itself, which brings together European national institutes of culture without managing directly activities on the ground. In fact, EUNIC coordinates a network of around 100 local clusters around the world, including the MENA region, where national institutes voluntarily decide to organise joint local activities. The Network is very active at a central level in Brussels and cooperates in many activities of the EU, among which the recent Cultural Diplomacy Platform. Also, it sees its role recognised in EU initiatives, communications and strategies touching culture in external relations. Most recently, EUNIC has been in the process of developing a Partnership Document with European Commission Services and the European External Action Service to join forces in light of the 2016

Communication. This partnership is based on the definition of common principles, values and objectives and on the development of cooperation activities stemming from shared interests on a voluntary basis. Cooperation between national institutes of culture and EU Delegations at the local level are to be organised on a 'variable geometry' basis and explored through the creation of pilot projects. In any case, there is no intention to transform national institutes of cultures in 'focal points' for a single European strategy defined at the EU level; neither in the MENA region, nor in general[86]. In terms of compatibility of EU's idea of Cultural Diplomacy and Member States' one, the extent to which national institutes focus on showcasing or instead work on capacity building and intercultural dialogue changes both across national institutes and across target countries. If, on the one hand, many countries are still attached to traditional Cultural Diplomacy – even in their joint activities –, EUNIC almost exclusively supports cluster projects that address capacity building, people-to-people contacts and initiatives involving more co-ownership with local actors[87].

Individually, some European Mediterranean countries explicitly use the CD label, for example France and Greece, which present it as one of their foreign policy instruments . Also, the concept has been endorsed and used by many national political leaders. As an example of this, the Advisory Board of the Berlin-based Institute for Cultural Diplomacy – reunited for the Annual Conference on Cultural Diplomacy in December 2016 –, include several former Presidents and Prime Ministers of European countries like Spain, Italy, Belgium, Ireland, Finland, Croatia, Slovenia, Estonia, Albania and Romania as well

as many Ministers, former ministers and other key political and cultural figures[89].

2. Capacity

2.1 Engaged and skilled professionals

The management of Cultural Diplomacy initiatives requires a broad set of complementary profiles in terms of expertise: culture professionals and entrepreneurs, artists, project managers and policy experts, in a close dialogue with regulators and policy-makers. In the context of Euromed Programmes, a good sample in terms of expertise comes from the already cited regional capacity building and support units, composed of professionals with experience in the management of cultural programmes and projects, often having a formation or professional background in the study or production of cultural products like movies, literature, architecture etc. . As an example of this, Euromed Audiovisual was headed by a Cinema expert, manager and entrepreneur, and included a photographer and communication expert on the side of project managers and a web developer[90].

Training, capacity building and the creation of networks have been fundamental aspects in supporting cultural operators in countries which – in diverse and changing ways –, are often ignoring or even hindering the flourishing of independent cultural productions. The platform of regional dialogue set up by the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean have so far involved an estimated 10.000 stakeholders consisting in diverse institutional and civil society actors[91]. Also, the Anna Lindh Foundation runs a 'network of national networks' which is managed by a focal point/head of networks in each member state and includes around 4500 Civil Society organisations among which institutional national, regional and local actors, NGOs, foundations, private entities and individuals. The networks often organise capacity building and training events, partly supported by the Foundation itself[92]. Also, ALF-granted projects contain many examples of training in cultural field, in cinema (*A Purple Touch to the Cinema: Cache Tales*), Cultural entrepreneurship (*Cultural entrepreneurship in Palestine*), Policy Analysis for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) (*Intercultural Approach for CSO's Advocacy Skills on Public Policies*), training teachers and educators on intercultural dialogue (*Living together in the Mediterranean*) and more.

As discussed extensively throughout this paper, training and capacity building activities for cultural operators and regulators have been organised in the framework of most EU regional programmes in the Mediterranean. Good examples of this are provided by the project Media Hub under the OPEN Neighbourhood Programme, which trains journalists and media specialists to reinforce an independent and competent media sector in the target region. The now-closed three Euromed programmes for culture have all supported training and capacity building, both with their own activities and through their grantees. The interviews conducted with the Team Leaders of the regional and technical support units of the regional programmes[93] and heads of sub-granting projects[94], all shown a great emphasis on capacity building and empowerment of local actors

in their respective cultural fields. An example of the regional training activities organised by Euromed Audiovisual is the *Socrates scriptwriting and script editing training initiative* which brought together a group of script writers and script editors in Djerba in October 2014 to develop screenplays for 12 upcoming movies from the region, under the guidance and supervision of experts[95]. Much of the activities developed by regional programmes like Euromed Heritage or Med Culture (see next section) can be defined as Cultural Diplomacy, but in a different way from traditional 'showcasing', as they work on capacity building and the empowering role of culture for local stakeholders and cultural operators[96]. Euromed Heritage funded regional projects with a strong component of training of professional, like *Mutual Heritage : From historical integration to contemporary active participation*[97]. More recent programmes also focused on training and capacity building. The Med Culture project SouthMed CV, managing sub-granting, held multiple capacity building meetings in 2016 and 2017 with the explicit aim to 'strengthen regional exchanges during the implementation of the sub-granted projects by identifying potential synergies with other relevant initiatives'[98] trying to leave a legacy of knowledge, networks and common ideas for projects[99]. Having in mind the short-termed nature of the programme and project, SouthMed CV sub-grantees were even asked to plan their activities ahead for three years, to make the networks and planning last beyond the project itself[100]. The programme MedMedia has also worked on training activities in the media sector, cooperating with regional networks like the Permanent Conference of the Mediterranean Audiovisual Operators (COPEAM), *inter alia* on the topic of training for journalists[101] and in a recent initiative of in-house training of national broadcasters[102].

Besides these programmes, Erasmus + has a specific action for capacity building activities both in the field of Youth (with Tunisia) and in Higher Education for all Southern Partners. Capacity building projects push EU universities to cooperate with Southern Mediterranean ones by involving either one or multiple countries in the South. Although applicants can apply for both national or regional projects, statistically they prefer regional ones. The activities focus on either curriculum development, or on improving governance and modernization of universities, or finally on developing link between university and enterprises[103].

A best practice in terms cultural empowerment has also been the SALTO-YOUTH Euromed resource centre, organising training for organisations and operators working with youth in the region, chiefly in the framework of Erasmus + Youth in action and for accreditation for the European Voluntary Service. In a 'permanent miracle' of intercultural cooperation, the centre has organized around 157 activities including 5899 participants from the region[104]. The forward-looking nature of this approach consists in training actors for their participation in EU-funded programmes, ensuring capability and quality for participation instead of a simple offer or financial resources.

2.2 Investing financial resources on CD

Cultural Diplomacy and broader cultural cooperation partly rely on ad-hoc financial instruments, but are mostly addressed transversally by the EU through a variety of programmes touching the MENA region. Two general features should be noted when examining the available programmes. First, many of them do not have an ex-

clusive geographical of thematic character. With few exceptions, big programmes either target a broader geographical area than MENA (e.g. potentially Creative Europe) or address culture as just one of the sectors of cooperation (e.g. Cross Border Cooperation under ENI), or both (e.g. Erasmus +, Development Cooperation Instrument). Second, funding for cultural cooperation comes – apart from regional programmes –, from a variety of instruments which are managed by different DGs in the European Commission and other entities, and therefore prioritise different aspects. In fact, approaches change depending on the nature of the funding: DG EAC will have a different approach in managing Erasmus + – a European programme which has been opened to third countries –, compared to DG NEAR and DG DEVCO when contributing financially to the same programme through instruments made for foreign countries. Nonetheless, close cooperation among DGs is sought and strategies are integrated[105].

Starting from the initiatives with the clearest regional dimension, the forth phase of the Anna Lindh Foundation (2015-2017) has been allocated 15 million, 7 from the ENI and 8 from ALF Member States[106].

As far as the recently closed phase of Euromed programmes is concerned, Euromed Heritage, Euromed Audiovisual and Euromed Youth were allocated respectively 17, 11 and 5 million Euro . A more recent and ongoing programme, created under ENPI in response to the Arab Springs to bring forward some of the work done by former regional programmes, is 'Media and culture for development in the Southern Mediterranean',

which has a budget of 17 million for 2014-2017. Media and culture are here perceived as fields that support the transition to democratic societies both in terms of intercultural relations, as well as in creating opportunities for human, social and economic development. Also, the programme seeks to coordinate with cultural diplomacy activities from the member states[108]. Most of the funds (9 million) are assigned through calls for proposals for 'support to freedom of expression and democratisation for community and social media' and 'reinforcement of the capacities of the cultural operators'. This instrument also includes two capacity development sub-programmes: MedMedia (5 million) and Med Culture (3 million)[109]. The second is working through sub-granting, which allows the get closer to the needs and better communicate with local actors[110]. MedMedia is based on a simple service contract and does not work with grants. It started as a policy dialogue programme with regulators and later expanded to address the broader media sector in 5 strands: youth empowerment, gender equality, hate speech and racism, legal reform and a campaign to create a Special Rapporteur for Media Freedoms in the Arab World under the aegis of the League of Arab States[111]. The programme also developed a peer-to-peer pairing for media institutions which was initially intended to work on south-south twinning but instead developed as north-south cooperation. This choice was dictated by a lack of demand in south-south twinning, since stakeholders did not show interest in learning from their peers in the region. This has been mostly determined by the perceived uniqueness that each country has in terms of its needs in the field[112]. MedMedia also worked very closely with pre-existing

networks in the region like COPEAM, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU)[113]. Euromed Audiovisual had also made the choice to use of pre-existing platforms, cooperating closely with platforms like COPEAM[114]. As for Med Culture, the programme managed to create cooperation among young cultural operators through new and pre-existing networks, also working together with regional actors like the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC)[115], which also interacted with SouthMed CV[116]. Additionally, it managed to bridge the gap between competent Ministries in southern countries and cultural operators, creating a policy dialogue between them[117]. Another regional programme, MedFilm, was launched in 2015 to tackle sensitive issues and radicalization through support to the sector, involvement of female filmmakers, and exchange of movies in the region, with a budget of 5.375.000 Euro[118]. Euromed regional programmes mostly try to include the stakeholders and assess the specificities of countries on a national basis, and successively develop a regional approach, which is at times faced with a lack of cooperation among Southern Partners or with the lack of a common regional response[119].

On top of these programmes, the already cited Open Neighbourhood (2015-2019) should receive around 18.2 million of ENI funds to enhance communication and understanding of the role and policies of the EU in the neighbourhood with the goal, *inter alia*, to 'strongly support the EU Delegations public diplomacy and outreach activities in partner countries by providing targeted support to them in communicating EU values, policies and results of EU programmes and projects'[120].

Two things should be noted about *regional* programmes. First, cultural heritage has currently no ad-hoc funding instrument. This was decided after having consulted local stakeholders, which voiced more need for culture and media programmes[121]. In the coming years, cultural heritage will most likely be addressed through bilateral programmes[122]. Second, the future of regional programmes seems uncertain altogether, as it is still unclear what will come next. In general terms, the EU struggles to emancipate from the establishment of short-termed programmes which not only make it difficult to create a homogeneous and longer strategy for cultural cooperation with the MENA, but also risks to throw away the results achieved from each programme and fail to ensure the necessary follow-up. This should be analysed from a user/applicant perspective: life for cultural operators is more uncertain and expectations are less stable if they cannot rely on the support of the EU in the longer term and if they are 'left alone' after the closing of a programme. For many CSOs like NGOs and cultural operators in the region, external technical and financial support is not only a matter of economic success, but also an empowering factor. External support emancipates them from the volatility of dependency ties with national authorities: when they no longer interact with the government by begging for money and support, they become more active and powerful players in the cultural and economic development of their countries[123].

Coming to another ENPI/ENI instrument partly touching culture and intercultural dialogue, the Civil Society Facility was created as a response to the Arab Springs and announced in the 2011

Communication *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood*. Currently included in ENI South Objective 3: 'Building a Partnership with the People', it attracted 34 million for the period 2011-2013. Most importantly for focus of this research, the ENI South has recently decided to support, within this CS framework, the creation of a Regional Dialogue Hub, proposed by the Anna Lindh Forum in 2013. This platform should be governed by Civil Society and bring together CSOs with the European Commission and regional actors like Anna Lindh Foundation, League of Arab States, Union for the Mediterranean and Council of Europe. The EU financed with 3 million a call for proposal for setting up its secretariat. The latter is one of the three components of the Programme 'Empowerment of young women and men in the Neighbourhood South'[124]. This programme also finances with 3.29 million the upgrading of the *Young Arab Voices* network – created in 2011 by the ALF and the British Council to engage Arab youth in training and capacity building on dialogue and debate –, into *Young Mediterranean Voices.* This is set to become the 'widest, most recognised regional youth network connecting civil society, education institutions and policy-makers across Europe and the MENA' [125]. Finally, one last component (5 million) will address Participation and visibility of young women and men in pluralistic media, building upon and complementing the activities of MedMedia.

Also ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) (2007-2013) had a priority for the promotion of cultural dialogue and local governance and it funded several cultural project across countries in the region[126]. The new ENI CBC, co-designed in its strategy by a Joint Monitoring Committee bringing together European and Southern Partners, has been assigned

a budget of 209 million for the period 2014-2020[127]. Unfortunately, a Thematic Objective specifically targeting culture has not made it to the final Operational Programme, but cultural cooperation can be addressed transversally, for example through the objectives for the 'promotion of social inclusion and fight against poverty' and 'support for education, research, technological development and innovation'[128].

EU programmes targeting public administrations for technical assistance and information exchange (TAIEX) and institutional cooperation (Twinning) are also open to most ENP South countries – as well as Gulf Counties under TAIEX. Projects on culture are being implemented but remain a minor focus of these programmes, as suggested by the most recent reports available for 2013, 2014 and 2015[129].

The main European programme for culture, Creative Europe (2014-2020), with a budget of 1.460 million divided in two sub-programmes for Culture and Media, is also formally open to ENP countries[130]. However, while formally eligible, few of them participate to the programme, possibly due to the eligibility criteria to be met for the Media sub-programme as well as the presence of an 'entry ticket' based on GDP size[131]. To date, the only MENA countries partially participating to Creative Europe are Israel and Tunisia[132].

Among the most recent programmes addressing CD topics there is the Partnership Instrument, created in 2014 with the aim to support EU foreign policy objectives and the external dimension of its internal policies[133], which has a general budget of 954.8 million. One of the innovative aspects of this instrument is having dedicated

around 85 million to public diplomacy – including Cultural Diplomacy –, targeting academics, policy-makers, CSOs and cultural operators. All of this is pursued in a mix of 'traditional' and new public and cultural diplomacy, aiming on the one hand to 'promote the EU's values and interests' and 'improve perceptions of the EU' and, on the other hand, to 'empower cultural operators'[134]. The instrument, however, does not primarily target the MENA region, with the exception of Gulf countries[135].

Intercultural dialogue clearly plays a role in the activities promoted in formal and informal education, first by Tempus and Erasmus Mundus (Action 2, Strand 1 and Action 3) and – under the current programming period –, by Erasmus +. Many Tempus Projects, mostly addressing capacity building and harmonization activities, included a regional dimension and had among the active partners the Association of Arab Universities[136]. In financial terms, Erasmus + has 259.999.643 Euro of foreseen 2017 appropriations from Heading 4 of the EU budget (Global Europe). In the period 2014-2017, the following funds have been reserved for ENP South countries: 94 million for international mobility of students and staff to and from partner countries (ENP East 71 million); 10 million for Erasmus Mundus Joint Degrees (ENP East 8 million); and 105 million for Capacity Building in higher education (ENP East 52 million). For the same actions, Middle Eastern countries (Iran, Iraq and Yemen) should receive respectively 2.48 million, 6.1 million and 7 million from the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI). Gulf Countries are also receiving minor funding through the Partnership Instrument[137]. Erasmus + mobility actions in the

MENA overwhelmingly focus on North-South exchanges, with limited exceptions for some Youth exchanges projects. Also, an Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme has been established under the DCI PanAfrican Programme, and it has an open call of 9.9 Million Euro for 2017[138]. Erasmus + shows in general a strong commitment to the Mediterranean region, signalled by the fact that Southern Partners are among the few countries (ENP, Central Asia and Russia) to have Erasmus + National Offices, which advise potential candidates, monitor running projects in their respective country and promote the programme locally, also helping policy dialogue when needed[139].

On top of this cooperation, researchers from the regions have also participated in Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions[140] which count on allowing 15,000 researchers from third countries to work in Europe by 2020[141].

Often cited when assessing cultural cooperation is also the Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), which targets various regions of the world, on issues that touch topics beyond culture, with a total budget of 130.290.000 Euro for 2016 and 132.804.000 Euro for 2017[142].

Among the funds and programmes potentially accessible by most MENA countries, which address Culture as a minor component, the Development Cooperation Instrument must be considered[143]. It has a general allocated budget of 19.662 million Euro, of which 545 are allocated to the Middle East geographic programme (from which however are excluded ENI and EDF countries) and, under the Global Public Goods and Challenges (GPGC) thematic programme, around 1.200 million to the for the thematic area

of Human Development, including Culture. Also, within GPGC culture should be mainstreamed on topics like the promotion and protection of cultural diversity[144]. Another DCI thematic programme addresses Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities, with an eye on regional networks. This programme has an overall indicative allocation of 1.907 million for 2014-2020[145]. The programme was allocated 426.075.000 Euro for 2015-2017 with 12.750.000 foreseen for Iran, Iraq and Yemen and 22.000.000 for the Southern Neighbourhood[146]. Finally, within the DCI, funds are also made available through the Pan-African Programme 2014-2020, with a budget of 845 million, which complements regional instruments like ENI with a continental or trans-regional approach[147]. Although not primarily targeting culture, some culture relevant initiatives are already being implemented, like the already mentioned Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme II managed by EACEA[148].

To a very minor extent, also the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, which deals with security and peace building in partner countries, touches issues concerning inter-cultural dialogue in some MENA countries, as it supports dialogue with civil society for reconciliation, deradicalisation and similar topics[149].

Finally, it should be stated that ENI mostly supports cultural cooperation through bilateral programmes, which fall beyond the reach of this work. However, among bilateral initiatives it is worth to mention the particular attention to Tunisia recent years, aimed at insuring democratic leadership in the region. A programme of support to the Cultural Sector was approved in 2015 and

it is currently managed by the British Council[150]. Also, the High Representative Federica Mogherini recently launched and EU-Tunisia Youth Partnership, underlining how Erasmus + has already earmarked 400 million euro for youth mobility, education and employment of young Tunisians − to which around 600 million will be probably added for 2017-2020[151].

2.3 Establishment of institutions and agencies dedicated to promoting CD goals

Institutions, agencies and bodies pursuing CD goals were established or supported by the EU within diverse frameworks, but are often addressing broader topics than culture itself. The most relevant novelty is the establishment of the EU-funded Cultural Diplomacy Platform launched in march 2016, based on the recommendations of the 2014 Preparatory Action and bringing together the key national institutes of culture in Europe, led by Goethe-Institut, to advice and strengthen EU CD activities[152]. Key institutions in regional cultural cooperation were established within the UfM and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership: the already cited ALF, EMUNI (and its Centre for Arab, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies − AIMES) and Euro-Mediterranean University of Fez. The Anna Lindh Foundation has in turn contributed to the creation of entities dealing with intercultural dialogue, like the Mediterranean Forum analysed in section 1.2. The Barcelona process is also connected with bodies which have not been directly established by the EU or UfM, like the Permanent Conference of the Mediterranean Audiovisual Operators (COPEAM), which often cooperates with the EU, the Anna Lindh

Foundation and takes part to multiple EU-funded projects and initiatives[153].

Other fora and meetings created within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership also contribute to inter-cultural dialogue and partly address cultural issues, like the yearly Euromed Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions[154] and – to a different extent in their respective fields of work –, the EuroMed Trade Union Forum[155], the EuroMed Social Dialogue Forum[156] and the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly[157]. More importantly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM) grants a space for inter-cultural dialogue, bringing together both the European and EU Member States parliaments with parliaments from Southern Partners. A specific Committee addresses the topics of 'Improving Quality of Life, Exchanges between Civil Societies and Culture', and specific Working Groups have focused on EMUNI and 'ways for the Assembly to participate in bodies of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures'[158]. Formally outside of the UfM framework, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) brings together almost 30 countries from the region as well as several regional and international organisations as observers (e.g. UNESCO, PA-UfM, LAS and more). The PAM is an observer at the UN General Assembly and manages the parliamentary dimension of the 5+5 Dialogue, actively taking part to its ministerial and Heads of State activities[159].

Within the broader framework of the Barcelona process, a Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission (EuroMeSCo) was created in 1996 as a Mediterranean network of research centres in politics and security to address both research goals and information/networking among its members[160]. EuroMeSCo includes some of the key research institutes and thinks tanks which specifically focus on EU-MENA relations also covering culture, like the European Institute for Research on Mediterranean and Euro-Arab cooperation (MEDEA)[161] – head of the ALF Belgian Network –, Casa Árabe[162], IEMed[163], Fondazione Mediterraneo[164] and others, as well as different entities like EUNIC. MEDEA hosts the Secretariat of the Mediterranean Citizens Assembly, an international CSO working on inter-cultural dialogue in a broad sense[165]. In the field of higher education, one of the already cited Tempus projects including the Association of Arab Universities, called *Leadership in Higher Education Management*, established an Arab European Leadership Network in Higher Education (ARELEN), fostering capacity building, networking, information sharing and dialogue[166]. A space of 'dialogue and cooperation' between the EU and LAS has been created with the establishment of the Euro-Arab Foundation for Higher Studies (FUNDEA) in Granada in 1995, based on European Parliament Decision to constitute a Euro-Arab University[167].

The already cited Institute for Cultural Diplomacy has also addressed Euro-Mediterranean issues, for example co-establishing a Master degree in Euro-Mediterranean Studies and Cultural Diplomacy[168] and co-organising a Euro-Mediterranean Forum for Cultural Diplomacy hosted by the Chios Institute for Mediterranean Affairs in Rhodes in 2010[169].

In the broader context of democracy promotion, the Council of the EU declared the establishment

of the trust fund European Endowment for Democracy (EED) , which operates in the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood and it is supporting many initiatives supporting civil society, youth, women, arts and media and more[171].

3. Acceptance

3.1 Committed citizenry

Post-Arab Spring MENA Countries undoubtedly constitute a fertile ground for European initiatives in Cultural Diplomacy and for inter-cultural dialogue involving Civil Society and citizenry at large. However, the role of cultural actors in the region is – with varying degrees across countries –, often hindered by unfavourable legal, political and social environments for both local and European initiatives in culture. The potential of citizenry in the MENA is highlighted by the fact that it is often easier to create regional cooperation among cultural operators, including universities[172], rather than governments, which are divided by many political and historical unresolved disputes[173]. Citizens also play a role in pressuring their governments to engage with young people and in fostering reform in sectors like the media[174]. Nonetheless, a generally positive stance of citizens and cultural operators towards EU involvement in Culture is often accompanied by mistrust towards Europe's role in the region due to its colonial past and by a demand for more co-ownership and equal involvement in both method and content.

Interest and active participation in EU activities from cultural operators and other citizens is suggested, in their respective fields, by the satisfactory level of involvement of stakeholders in regional programmes[175] and sub-contracting projects like SouthMed CV[176]. However, creating a regional dimension for cooperation in the programme and project activities is an effort whose feasibility varies across sectors and countries. A regional dimension is sometimes supported by the requirement to create project consortia including actors from more than one country in the region, as well as by networking and capacity building events organised both at the programme and project level. Nonetheless, it is at times difficult to convince actors to see beyond their own countries and to acknowledge that there could be entities with similar interests in the region. Also, if this might work well for professionals in the cultural sectors, it is difficult to open it up to normal people[177].

A fair level of interest in inter-cultural dialogue and cooperation from MENA citizens was revealed by the 2014 *Report on Intercultural Trends and Social Change in the Euro-Mediterranean Region* of the Anna Lindh Foundation, based on two surveys made in 2009 and 2012 in the region. When asking to the interviewees what interest they had in news and information about European cultural life and lifestyle, 65% showed interested in 2012, with a +4% increase compared to 2009. An upward trend could be seen also by interviewing Europeans about their Southern Neighbours (76% in 2009, 85% in 2012). Adding to this North-South gap, challenges were potentially poised by the fact that, while generally in favour of cultural diversity as important for the prosperity of their own society, in 2012 48% of the European respondents and 46% of people in Southern Partner countries believed that religious and cultural diversity constituted a threat to the stability of society[178].

A series of surveys conducted between 2012-2014, denominated *EU Neighbourhood barometer*, give useful insights about perceptions of the EU in the area. In the latest survey[179], from Spring 2014, 62% of the population of the Maghreb (excluding Libya[180]) had positive perceptions of the EU, 23% had neutral perceptions and 8% negative ones. Morocco topped the list (77% positive), followed by Algeria (62%) and Tunisia (51%). When asked to mention what were the most important domains of cooperation between their country and the EU, Culture and Education were chosen by 27% of the respondents with an +6 upwards trend compared to the previous year – below commerce, employment, migration and human rights –, but better than important fields like democracy and good governance, infrastructure, energy and environment. However, culture and education were deemed an important priority for future cooperation by only 9% of the respondents. Also, most respondents (51%) judged that there was sufficient information on the EU in their country, against 36% of negative responses. A lower relative majority of positive perceptions of the EU were also found in the Mashreq, with 41% positive answers, 37% neutral and 13% negative. The best results were found in Palestine (59%), followed by Lebanon (51%), Israel (36%), Jordan (22%) and Egypt (13%), with the latter having by far the highest number of people who were unable to respond (66%). Culture and education were similarly indicated by an historically stable 23% as important fields of cooperation – below commerce, security, poverty fight, human rights and science and technology – but same as employment and higher than migration, environment, energy and others. Again, culture and education only made it to a 9% as desired fields of cooperation.

26

In terms of information on the EU, 48% judged to have enough of it in their country, against a 41% who did not. Specific surveys on culture[181] were conducted in Spring 2014 and can give us an interesting idea of the cultural basement to build upon. On the one hand, only 36% of the people in the Maghreb felt close to European culture, while 94% of them felt close to the national one. Most importantly in terms of 'acceptance' of CD goals, 60% agreed that cultural activities contribute to the social well-being of their country (32% no, 7% did not know); 59% agreed that culture and cultural activities can play an important role in developing greater understanding and tolerance in the world, even where there are conflicts and tensions (33% no, 7% did not know); 58% agreed that cultural activities contribute to the economic development of their country (35% no, 6% did not know). In the Mashreq, a higher 43% said they felt close to European culture, and 79% to the national one. The contribution of culture and cultural activities in their country was perceived as important for social well-being (74%), tolerance and understanding (75%) and economic development (75%).

Despite this fertile ground, a more recent survey (SAHWA Youth Survey 2016), which interviewed face-to-face more than 10,000 young aged 15-29 years old in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, revealed an undeniable problem of communication concerning EU initiatives. When interviewees were asked to the question if they were aware of the European Union programmes put in place in their country, only 1.65% answered positively, and the remaining 98.35% stated they did not. When asked whom, in their opinion, benefits most from the cooperation with the European Union, 29.94% said the current government,

19.18% the rich and powerful, 16.07% politicians, 10.96% external actors, 6.62% security services and only 11.42 % the people in general, 2.63% civil society and 1.69% young people. Again, this underlines how difficult it is to reach the broader population with the current limited resources. With the available instruments, it might be possible to achieve visible results in smaller countries like Jordan, Lebanon or Palestine, but it is hard to make a certain assessment of the impact of Cultural initiatives on the society of big countries like Egypt[182].

3.2 Buy-in from national and regional politicians

Political commitment from MENA countries to European cultural initiatives targeting their citizens varies greatly across countries and it is strongly affected by the quick political changes and instabilities in the region. In legal terms, ENP South countries have signed Associations Agreements with the EU which – through different formulas and to various degrees –, all committed to the promotion of 'social and cultural cooperation and on educational matters, in particular through intercultural dialogue, migration control, developing qualifications, promoting labour law and gender equality'[183], concepts which were restated and further tailored in the successive country-specific Action Plans[184]. An exception to this framework is constituted by Libya, which has never signed an Association Agreement but holds an observer status in the UfM and receives funding through ENI programmes. In spite of the country's instability, the government and the then-General National Congress had at times committed to work with the EU on projects supporting Civil Society[185]. However, the current political chaos affecting the Government of National Accord obviously leaves little space for cultural initiatives. A Minister of Culture has nonetheless been appointed: Asma Mustafa al-Usla, one of the two women in the government. Similarly, Syria never ratified the Association Agreement which was negotiated in 2004 and – in the wake of the explosion of the conflict –, the country has been suspended by both bilateral and regional cooperation, with EU assistance starting to target directly the Syrian population[186].

MENA countries outside of the ENP are either affected by security, economic and social problems that relegate EU cultural engagement with national authorities to a bare minimum, or are characterised by strict state control dictated by ultra-conservative religious, social and political systems, or both. Even so, the conditions for potential cooperation have been progressively laid down. Iraq, for instance, has signed in 2011 a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement committing to cultural cooperation and dialogue, creating grounds for improving the otherwise minor and Member States-driven financial and technical assistance in culture[187]. More recently, the agreement on Iran nuclear programme has potentially opened the path for future cooperation with the EU in many fields, including culture[188]. As already indicated, even EU-GCC relationships have seen a progressive opening towards cultural relations, and the activities in public diplomacy and communication on EU affairs created by the *Al Jisr* Project represent a promising example in this respect. However, carrying out cultural and civil society cooperation initiatives

in Gulf Countries is often hindered by state-imposed and social limitations to cultural expressions which seriously narrow down the room for manoeuvre granted to EU and MS initiatives on the ground[189]. Finally, Yemen has signed a co-operation agreement with the EU also including cooperation in various cultural fields[190] but, given the humanitarian situation of the country, while CSOs have been increasingly targeted with funding, cooperation in culture remains very limited both in strategies[191] and on the ground[192].

In the context of the UfM, involvement of Southern Partners, policy dialogue and co-ownership of the projects is sought through the 'labelling' system, which seeks for consensual endowment of projects funded by other entities, giving political support by the implementing countries and certifying the regional relevance of the initiative[193]. At the political level, the UfM develops many high-level initiatives and dialogues touching culture, a recent example being the multi-stakeholder regional dialogue process on women's empowerment launched by UfM Senior Officials in 2015[194].

With respect to national cultural policies, giving an exhaustive overview in the region is beyond the reach of this work. However, studies like the 2014 Preparatory Action and the country reports drafted by Med Culture can provide examples of the most common political and legal challenges in the region. MENA countries often retain a relatively clientelistic approach to support and funding in culture, which pushes many cultural operators to create their own networks with local and regional actors[195]. Algeria faces problems of relatively centralised (although inefficient) control

of cultural initiatives, which creates uncertainty for independent actors and leaves little room for EU manoeuvre. The country has a national approach to Cultural diplomacy as traditional showcasing of national culture[196]. Nonetheless, legal attention and financial commitment to culture have been on the rise in recent years. The country now has the richest Ministry of Culture in Africa and in the Arab world, even though civil society is not consulted in the spending and the management is inefficient[197]. Egypt's cultural centrality in the Arab world had helped the country to become a key actor in exporting cultural products and – in the post-2011 instable political environment –, foreign funding was sustaining the work of cultural operators which were lacking coherent support from the ministries[198]. Things have progressively gotten worse. Adding to the presence since 2002 of a law putting strict control on authorisation of foreign funding for NGOs – repression escalated after 2011 when several NGOs were raided and many NGO operators convicted. This opened a phase which brought to various legal and political restrictions, among which a short-notice obligation to register all similar associations as NGOs[199], which is culminating in the approval of an even more restrictive bill[200]. EU-funded activities in the country, similarly to the activities of any other external donor, were affected by the slow or negative procedure of approval managed by the Ministry of Social solidarity and other actors in the control chain[201]. This is keeping funds blocked, leading for example to the de-commitment of the country to the Med Culture project *Investing in Culture & Arts in the South Mediterranean (ICAM)*[202]. In general terms, Morocco shows better signs of political commitment to internation-

al cultural relations, also thanks to its political stability and the recent reformist path towards a more democratic parliamentary constitutional monarchy. Being the Southern Partner with the longest standing relations with the EU, Morocco was the first to achieve an 'advanced' partner status in 2008. The 2013-2017 EU-Morocco Action Plan implementing this status restated and put specific emphasis on how this special relationship is strongly based on humans and social relations, with a specific attention to culture and intercultural dialogue[203]. Nonetheless, despite Morocco's participation EU programmes and the announcement of a strategy for culture towards 2020 – funding, spaces and access to culture remain very poor[204]. Public institutions in Tunisia have shown a moderate support to cultural activities, especially as it concerns heritage, festivals and standardised events with a commercial dimension. Despite the presence of an average level of funding for culture, resource and state support to key creative sectors is still insufficient[205]. In spite of the active participation in EU programmes and the recent development of country-tailored EU programmes in the field of education and culture[206] – culture and cultural policies still struggle to open to an external dimension[207]. Smaller countries in the region partly share problems related to lack of funding and inefficient use of resources but have their own specificities, like the almost total absence of coherent state policies and support in culturally prolific Lebanon[208]; lack of state funding and political will to internationalise national art productions in Israel, strongly due to the prioritization of defence spending[209]; or the case of Palestine, a member of UNESCO since 2011, which has progressively understood the power of culture as a

political tool – but where funds are insufficient, political and administrative control of the territory fragmented and reliance on external donors very strong[210].

In terms of citizens perception of national engagement, the EU Neighbourhood barometer revealed that the national government is still perceived as the most important actor contributing to the cultural development of its country: 89% of the respondents would agree with this in Maghreb and 69% in Mashreq, which is higher than the perceived contribution made by national private companies (61% and 57%), national banks (56% and 54%), international private banks (52% and 54%), NGOs (52% and 57%), local authorities (51% and 57%), international/multinational private companies (50% and 47%), regional authorities (50% and 47%) and religious organisations (43% and 46%)[211].

To different extents – dictated both by the sensitiveness of the topics of cooperation and most importantly by the specific level of importance attributed to policy dialogue –, many EU programmes saw the participation of government and ministerial officials in various phases, from definition of priorities to policy-dialogue at programme or project level. Nonetheless, not all countries showed the same responsiveness and involvement. In the case of Euromed Youth IV, out of the 8 participating countries, 'Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine have well cooperated, others like Algeria and Morocco didn't use their allocated funds, others like Egypt didn't have the will to sign for the extension of the Programme in 2014 and finally Syria refused to participate in the whole process since 2010'[212]. Furthermore,

governments' involvement in EU cultural initiatives is not necessarily tantamount to regional cooperation between them, and it has at times been characterised by a lack of coordination and cooperation (e.g. missing visas for participants in activities hosted by one country), hindering European initiatives[213]. In the case of Med Culture, neither the Algerian nor the Egyptian government have relationship with the programme, while Morocco has at least shown some responsiveness[214]. Closed programmes like Euromed Youth also experienced little responsiveness from these countries[215.] Euromed Audiovisual has possibly received a better response and more cooperative stance from all the national authorities involved[216] which could be explained both by the centrality of policy dialogue within the programme – which was aimed at sector reform in target countries –, as well as the easier profitability of audiovisual products. SouthMed CV had problems to operate in Egypt because of the already cited control on external funding, and experienced similar problems in Algeria because of the difficulties in making financial transaction in the country. Morocco showed again only partial willingness to cooperate, while relatively satisfactory results have been achieved in Jordan. Palestine shown a very good level of cooperation both from authorities and cultural actors, while Lebanon confirmed to have a very thriving and responsive civil society, not properly supported by the government resources . Several initiatives organised by MedMedia had a very positive response by national regulators in the sector, most notably the peer-to-peer action pairing them with regulators and media actors from the EU for capacity building, which constitutes one of those opportunities where a clear added value is easily perceived[218].

To date, a negative example of involvement is constituted by the non-participation of most Southern Partners to the biggest European programme for culture, Creative Europe, for which they are eligible but which would require to pay an 'entry ticket' based on the size of their GDP.

3.3 Acceptance beyond the EU: other regional and international organisations

EU efforts in Cultural Diplomacy in the MENA region also rely on close cooperation with international organisations and agencies working with culture and intercultural dialogue: most importantly, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as other UN agencies.

In the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the European Cultural Convention in 2004, the CoE ministerial conference specifically focused on the promotion of intercultural dialogue within Europe and with the Southern Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Asia. The *Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue* was signed with the Anna Lindh Foundation, ALECSO and UNESCO in that context[219]. The key initiative in EU-CoE cooperation in the MENA is the so-called South Programme, a joint regional programme to strengthen democratic reform and governance in the Southern Neighbourhood. This has been almost entirely financed by the EU and implemented by CoE, with two phases: South programme I (2012-2014, 4.8 million Euro) and South Programme II (2015-2017, 7.4 mil-

lion Euro). Albeit mostly focused on democratic transformation and reform – based on CoE's expertise in the field –, the programme also fosters networking and peer-to-peer exchanges at various policy levels, putting emphasis on 'supporting a greater regional cooperation on topics related to human rights, the Rule of law and democracy'[220]. The EC also has a joint management agreement with CoE's North-South Centre for the support Global Development Education – comprising intercultural education and youth action[221]. For the period 2016-2019, the EC and the North-South Centre are partnering to support Global Development Education in the educational systems of the Balkans, Baltic, South East Europe, Mediterranean and Visegrad regions[222]. EU and CoE also have a history of cooperation in the context of Euromed Youth[223], which in 2005 took the form of a EU-CoE youth partnership mostly working on Human Rights Education and Intercultural dialogue[224].

The EU has also developed strong cooperation with UNESCO, particularly, but not exclusively, in the field of cultural heritage. A fundamental and often-cited[225] document framing EU commitment to the promotion of cultural diversity in its external relations is the 2005 UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*[226]. The Convention has been ratified by the EU and potentially represents an innovative instrument to transform multilateral Cultural Diplomacy into a more inclusive exercise of cooperation between the developed and developing world, beyond traditional definitions of the concept and pure showcasing[227]. UNESCO's engagement in culture in the Mediterranean region took a structured approach already in 1994, with the creation of the Mediterranean Programme, managing UNESCO activities in the region and working on the promotion of intercultural-dialogue, a culture of peace and sustainable co-development[228]. Among the projects developed with other key actors in the field, *The image of the Other in European and Arab and Islamic* textbooks has first launched an initiative of permanent intercultural dialogue bringing together UNESCO, LAS, ISESCO, ALECSO, the Anna Lindh Foundation and other actors[229]. In the field of cultural heritage, the Euromed Heritage-funded joint project MedLiHer – Mediterranean Living Heritage has targeted Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria with training activities and regional cooperation in 2009-2013[230]. The signing of a MoU between the EU and UNESCO in 2012[231] – which also put emphasis on intercultural dialogue and the role of culture in development –, has opened a phase of increased cooperation. In this context, the most visible regional achievement has been the 2014-2017 *Networks of Mediterranean Youth Project* (NET-MED) to mainstream youth issues in ENP South policies, particularly by enhancing networking and regional cooperation between youth organisation and other stakeholders[232].

Other UN agencies cooperating with the EU in the Mediterranean include UNIDO, UNDP and UN Women, which are also actively involved in activities of the Union for the Mediterranean[233]. UNIDO, for instance, implements the EU-Italy funded and UfM-labelled project *Development of clusters in cultural and creative industries in the Southern Mediterranean*, running from 2013 to 2017[234]. UN Women has jointly created with the EU the 2012-2016 regional programme *Spring*

Forward for Women[235] and it has signed a MoU with the UfM to promote gender equality and women empowerment in the region[236].

As already remarked, the League of Arab States and the EU have taken some steps towards social and cultural cooperation. Aspects related to this domain were included in the EU-LAS Joint Work Program (2016-2018), whose implementation is being facilitated by ECLASLO. This political endorsement does not come with a dedicated financial commitment, and implementing instruments need to be identified for each action. EC-LAS dialogue on social issues is however relatively dynamic and sees an active interest and involvement from LAS Member States. Dialogue is facilitated by a working method which avoids focusing on the most difficult subjects, trying to advance on common grounds. Nonetheless, sensitive topics are often discussed and receive widespread political support with, sometimes, different understandings of the issues at stake[237]. From its side, the LAS has started to show a more open stance towards cultural and social issues, undertaking initiatives like: declaring a 2016-2026 Decade of Arab Civil Society organisations, launched in February 2016[238] to encourage governments' engagement with CS; promoting the development of the LAS website into an information hub for civil society; and identifying best practices in legal frameworks for civil society to be proposed to the member states. In general, the LAS has committed to create a more structured dialogue and support for civil society, but there is still a long way to meet the expectations of CS actors struggling within their national contexts[239]. The LAS has also cooperated with the Anna Lindh Foundation[240], for example in the organisation of the 2016 MED FORUM in Malta[241]. Finally, the LAS participates to UfM activities at all levels, including policy dialogue on topics such as youth and women[242].

Conclusions

This paper has sought to provide a qualitative overview of the *willingness, capacity* and *acceptance* sustaining broadly-defined EU Cultural Diplomacy initiatives in the MENA region. Several tendencies have been identified, and their analysis provides insights into the challenges to be tackled in order to implement the still generic *strategy for international cultural relations*[243] in the region. During the past three decades, the EU has built promising legal and institutional frameworks of bilateral and (loosely) regional cooperation with the Arab world and Israel, officially creating the premises for initiatives in culture in almost every forum of EU-MENA dialogue. This cooperation has developed relatively well in its Euro-Mediterranean dimension – albeit still under-resourced when compared to its ambitious goals of 'convergence of civilisations', and not supported by a fully-fledged supranational regional organisation. In fact, the UfM remains more of a multilateral partnership with a regional focus: a regional organisation working with an intergovernmental method complemented by the contribution of the EU and LAS. On the contrary, inter-regional (region-to-region) cooperation with Arab countries has struggled to create substantive financial and institutional tools for culture, showing more encouraging trends only in recent years within the 5+5 Dialogue, EU-LAS relations and, to a minor extent, EU-GCC.

A strong attention to capacity building and training has allowed EU programmes to create the conditions for a lasting impact of cultural initiatives, defining the boundaries of EU's idea of Cultural Diplomacy as something that goes beyond pure showcasing of European cultural products. Also, EU programmes have sought – and partly succeeded –, to foster regional cooperation among the stakeholders involved, both by using pre-existing thematic networks and by creating new ones. MENA Countries have proved to be a fertile ground for actions targeting cultural actors, Civil Society Organisations and citizens at large. National governments have also demonstrated – to different extents – a degree of involvement in EU initiatives in culture, with some more problematic cases like Egypt and Algeria, and the almost complete exclusion of Libya and Syria, which are currently unable to participate in most activities.

The explosion of Arab Springs in 2011 has shown the need to revive the so called third chapter of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, within the broader effort of putting political goals back at the centre of regional cooperation. The EU has developed a relatively quick but limited response, building upon pre-existing funding instruments and legal arrangements, and creating new programmes like Media and culture for development in the Southern Mediterranean, the Civil Society Facility or Spring Forward for Women. Other regional and international organisations – already cooperating with the EU on culture –, have been involved in this effort, most notably the Council of Europe and UN agencies.

However, EU Cultural Diplomacy shows many fragilities, and political commitment will need to be backed up by regional strategies and resources for the years to come. First, the EU is far from reaching a coherent regional approach to Cultural Diplomacy in the MENA. Despite the existing complementarities and coordination among EU programmes – initiatives in culture do not respond to an overall strategy. Need for better cooperation is strongly voiced by most actors working with intercultural dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region, as lack of information and coordination brings to overlapping and missing opportunities for scaling up projects and results[244]. For example, networking initiatives across the region in specific cultural sectors like media are available, but as they come from many different organisations, they create overlapping and a certain 'roundtable fatigue'[245]. The lack of strong European coordination also brings to overlapping and inefficient access to resources in target countries, where even national authorities are often uninformed about the diverse forms of funding available[246] or have troubles to address the myriad of different actors offering funding[247]. EU delegations cooperate on the ground with regional programmes and projects, often in the dissemination and advertisement of activities, but their human and financial resources are not sufficient in every country[248]. Also, the goals set out in the 2016 strategy for culture in external relations are really ambitious for the current resources at their disposal[249].

Additionally, the biggest multi-country financial resources for cultural initiatives come from programmes that address issues like institutional cooperation, development, civil society, education or women and gender issues – while Euro-Mediterranean regional programmes for culture

remain relatively small. In culture as in any other field, regional programmes still constitute a very minor part of ENI funding, which by regulation can allocate up to 80% of its funds to bilateral programmes, and only up to 35% to multi-country programmes and 5% to cross-border cooperation[250].

To sum up, a credible regional strategy for Cultural Diplomacy in the MENA is still missing. After the Arab Springs, the EU has been creating regional programmes that have a short lifespan, and precise plans for future programmes have not been announced yet. The means and resources to implement the 2016 Communication will have to be further defined, as almost all the programmes cited in the document will soon come to an end[251]. Similarly, in its speech to the European Parliament, Commissioner Navracsics mostly talked about ongoing, short-termed or closing programmes[252]. No regional programme to carry on the work of Euromed Youth seems to be in sight[253], and the same applies to the field of Audiovisual for the specific Mediterranean region (apart from the smaller MedFilm, which has different goals), showing EU's short-termed approach to programming[254]. The recent Med Culture and MedMedia have not been granted a clear future either, and it is uncertain whether other regional programmes will take over their work. These programmes, after all, were created in the wake of the Arab Springs, and even if more work needs to be done in their fields, the momentum might be partly lost[255].

Forward-looking strategies and instruments for CD in the MENA region will therefore need to be defined. In doing this, the EU should consider several factors.

First, it is advisable to keep on putting emphasis on the link between culture and empowerment of local actors[256] and culture and development . In this respect, the role of capacity building and training is essential[258]. Also, engaging Arab youth with intercultural dialogue remains fundamental to respond to challenges such as religious radicalism and to promote a culture of democratic participation. Beyond culture, in order 'to ensure that space is truly set aside for our youngest citizens in the modern city, decision makers such as politicians and associations must be prepared to move beyond the trap of mere 'showcasing' and instead become vehicles for the expression of representative democracy' [259].

Second, more region-to-region interactions should be sought, and cooperation with actors like the LAS, the AMU and the GCC should be endowed with joint financial and technical resources to put into practice official commitments. The Euro-Mediterranean format is complementary to inter-regional approaches and represents a partial solution to the political tensions hindering cooperation among Southern Partners. More involvement and co-ownership from MENA countries would necessarily mean tailoring themes and cultural initiatives according to shared understandings and negotiated values. This is a mediation process which already happens and represents the only viable path to create mutual trust and expectations of peace, making the region slowly move towards a pluralistic Security Community.

Another question related to co-ownership is what level of EU engagement and visibility should be pursued. As we have seen, perceptions of the EU are generally positive, but a long-term ap-

proach and a potential step away from Cultural Diplomacy as showcasing would suggest putting local actors in charge of the management of activities. Tools like sub-granting seem to be on the rise, which is also a consequence of the need to reduce EU staff by delegating as much as possible in terms of management. However, for the new managers (CSOs, NGOS and other cultural actors) the level of responsibility and the required knowledge increases considerably[260]. Sub-granting also affects visibility, as cultural operators would have less and less direct contact with the EU[261], which is an aspect to carefully take into consideration. Although there is no clear indication of a strategic shift in this direction, if the EU wants to progressively make the management of initiatives closer to local needs and actors, this will require further efforts in capacity building and training in the short term.

Finally, the EU should define more clearly what its approach to Cultural Diplomacy is and what the use of this term involves. The still alive popularity of concepts like Normative Power Europe – as well as the creation of tools like the Partnership Instrument, partly aimed at advancing EU's core interests in the world with the help of public diplomacy –, should bring policy makers and observers to ask the following questions: is there room for a European traditional cultural diplomacy? Is a regional organisation which is based on 'unity in diversity' of national cultures prepared to showcase a truly European cultural image abroad? Answering this question in the case of regional cooperation with the MENA does not require to make a statement about the intrinsic superiority of capacity building and intercultural dialogue over traditional approaches.

What should rather be investigated is whether the former are naturally more suitable to a regional integration project like the EU, which has increasingly tried to sustain itself by promoting narratives of common cultural heritage and understanding between cultures after centuries of conflictual relations. The EU is a regional project with a strong internal need for intercultural dialogue and negotiation of shared identities. The experience, knowledge and practices developed in this process can and should be used when approaching other regions, especially those characterised by geographical proximity and a shared history of cultural exchanges.

Interviews

1. **Med Culture/Euromed Heritage**. Interviewee: Christiane Dabdoub Nasser, Team Leader, Med Culture Programme, former Head of the Regional Monitoring and Support Unit for Euromed Heritage IV. Skype interview, 07 February 2017.

2. **Euromed Youth/SALTO Youth**. Interviewee: Bernard Abrignani, Coordinator of Salto-Youth Euromed and Good Practices Resource Centre, former Project Director of the Regional Capacity Building and Support Unit for EuroMed Youth IV. Phone interview, 08 February 2017.

3. **Euromed Audiovisual**. Interviewee: Valerio Caruso, Cineuropa, Director, former Team Leader of the Regional Monitoring and Support Unit for Euromed Audiovisual. Phone interview, 08 February 2017.

4. **SouthMed CV.** Interviewee: Toni Cots, General Manager of the SouthMed CV project and

its consortium at Interarts. Skype interview, 09 February 2017.

5. **EUNIC Network**. Interviewee: Andrew Murray Director, EUNIC Network. Phone interview, 14 February 2017.

6. **European Commission DG NEAR**. Interviewee: Laetitia Ricklin, DG NEAR B2, Regional Programmes and Neighbourhood South. Phone interview, 15 February 2017.

7. **European Commission DG EAC**. Interviewee: Claire Herrmann, DG Education and Culture C/3, International cooperation. Phone interview, 16 February 2017.

8. **MedMedia.** Interviewee: Michael Randall, Team Leader, MedMedia. Skype interview, 21 February 2017.

9. **Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat.** Interviewees: Fatiha Hassouni, Program Manager, UfM Secretariat, Gender & Social Affairs; Emmanuelle Gardan, Program Manager, UfM Secretariat, Higher Education and research. Skype interview, 22 February 2017.

10. **European Commission-League of Arab States Liaison Office (ECLASLO)**. Interviewee: Giovanni Buttigieg, Executive Director, ECLASLO. Skype interview, 23 February 2017.

Footnotes

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6 Adler, E. and Crawford, B. (2002) 'Constructing a Mediterranean Region: A Cultural Approach', paper presented for the conference 'The Convergence of Civilizations? Constructing a Mediterranean Region', 6-7 June 2002, Arrábida Monastery, Fundação Oriente, Lisboa, Portugal, p. 17.

7 Isar, Y. R. (2010) 'Cultural Diplomacy: An Overplayed Hand?' Public Diplomacy Magazine, http://www.publicdiplomacymagazine.com/cultural-diplomacy-an-overplayed-hand/

8 See Isar, Y. R. (no date) 'Culture in external relations: the EU in cultural diplomacy', http://www.osce.org/secretariat/103748?download=true

9 See Preparatory Action 'Culture in EU External Relations. Engaging the World: Towards Global Cultural Citizenship', http://cultureinexternalrelations.eu/

10 See EC (2016) 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations', JOIN(2016) 29 final, Brussels, 8/06/2016.

11 Interview European Commission DG NEAR.

12 See EC (no date) 'Security and development, conflict prevention and the comprehensive approach', http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/fragility-and-crisis-management/links-between-security-and-development_en ; for a critical assessment of EU's approach see Merket, Hans. 'The EU and the Security-Development Nexus: Bridging the Legal Divide'. European Foreign Affairs Review, 18, Special Issue (2013): 83–102.

13 See Agreed Conclusions of the third Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Culture Athens, 29-30/05/2008, http://www.eeas.eu-

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14 The present work uses the main indicators developed in Kingah, S., Amaya A. B. and Van Langenhove, L. (2016) 'Requirements for Effective European Union Leadership in Science and Cultural Diplomacy on (Inter) Regionalism in the South', op. cit.. However, some of the concepts used in the inception paper are tailored to this specific case study, where 'regional' refers to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and 'inter-regional' to the tendency of the EU to approach MENA as a region or as multiple sub-regions rather than individual countries.

15 This analytical framework has been recast from Kingah, S. and Van Langenhove, L. (2012) 'Determinants of a regional organization's role in peace and security: Comparing the African Union and the European Union,' South African Journal of International Affairs, 19(2): 197-218; Zwartjes, M., Van Langenhove, L., Maes, L. and Kingah, S. (2012) 'Determinants of regional leadership: Is the European Union a leading regional actor in peace and security,' 12(3) Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 393-405; Van Langenhove, L. and Kingah, S. 'Conditions for effective regional social (health) policies: The EU and Unasur compared,' in: Bianculli, A. C. and Ribeiro Hoffmann, A. (eds.) (2016) Regional Organizations and Social Policy in Europe and Latin America: A Space for Social Citizenship?, London: Palgrave, pp. 231-250.

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26 EC (2016) JOIN(2016) 29 final, op. cit.

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Annex 1: Examples of EU CD interactions with the MENA Region, by funding programme/institution

Programme and/or Institution	Project name and period	Countries involved	Type of interaction	Brief description	Website
Media and culture for development in the Southern Mediterranean	SouthMed CV (2015-2018)	Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean)	"SouthMed CV intends to foster the role of culture in social cohesion. It will do so by funding cultural and artistic innovative projects related to human rights, gender, diversity, social inclusion or environmental issues, preferably with a potential and multiplier long-lasting effect. It will also contribute to the development of capacities and skills of cultural operators, institutional strengthening of cultural associations and networks, exchange of expertise at regional level, and promotion of cooperation between cultural organisations and other actors in civil society."	http://www.smedcv. net
	Drama, Diversity and Development programme (DDD) (2014-2017)	Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean)	"This project aims to support the efforts of the Southern Mediterranean countries' in building deep-rooted democracy and to contribute to their sustainable economic, social and human development, through regional co-operation in the fields of media and culture. It supports activities fostering cultural policy reform and reinforcing the capacity of cultural policy makers, as well as promoting investment and the development of cultural operators' business capabilities."	https://actfordiver-sity.org/
Open Neighbourhood	OPEN Media Hub: Networking, on-the-job training and support to media professionals across the EU Neighbourhood area (2015-2019)	Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean)	"The main objectives of the programme are: - To provide journalists in the Neighbourhood countries with skills that help to improve independent and objective reporting; - To provide Neighbourhood editorial and management staff with skills needed to run independent media outlets; To reinforce a network of Neighbourhood journalists and media professionals that is actively used as a professional resource and networking platform."	http://www.med-media.eu/project/eu-open-media-hub-project/
Empowerment of young women and men in the Neighbourhood South	Young Mediterranean Voices Programme (2016-TBD)	Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean)	"YOUNG MEDITERRANEAN VOICES is primed to become the widest, most recognised regional youth network connecting civil society, education institutions and policy-makers across Europe and the Middle East, North Africa region (MENA). Building on more than five years investment in the field, as well as established networks, pioneering methodologies and recently commissioned research, the overarching aim of the new Young Mediterranean Voices programme phase is to: "Empower young voices to enhance a culture of dialogue, shape public affairs and media discourses, and create a shared understanding with peers across the Mediterranean on how to address issues of common concern to their communities."	http://youngmed-voices.org/

Programme and/or Institution	Project name and period	Countries involved	Type of interaction	Brief description	Website
Anna Lindh Foundation	Intercultural Approach for CSO's Advocacy Skills on Public Policies (2012)	Austria, Egypt, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean	"Civitas and its partners will select 15 representatives of SCO's from Palestine "Gaza/WB", Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria"; the participants will exchange ideas and learn together on "Policy Analysis" and how to hold their national governments accountable towards their citizens".	http://www.annalindhfoundation.org/granted-projects/intercultural-approach-csos-advocacy-skills-public-policies
	Euro-Mediterranean Youth Music Expo (2012)	Belgium, Jordan, Germany	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean)	"This large-scale event brings together over 200 young musicians (…) EMYME is also a meeting/sharing point for Euro-Med based young musicians and professionals working in the field of cultural management and other related services (cultural NGOs, production companies, record labels, recording studios, web design and developers, music schools and academies)."	http://www.eaymc.org/projects/emyme-2012/
Erasmus Plus	Clearly Positive Cultures (4-12 September 2014)	Algeria, Bulgaria, Egypt, Germany, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean)	"The Training Course "Clearly Positive Cultures" answered the needs of youth workers in the field of work with the youngsters against prejudices in Europe and Arab cultures. (…) The main aim was to equip youth workers with the Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes to work with young people on breaking the stereotypes of Arab and European Cultures by using creative ways of expressions."	http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details-page/?nodeRef=workspace://SpacesStore/e754af10-daaf-4d64-9858-1c56cf60e48f
	LET'S ACT: Culture of Peace and Social Entrepreneurship in EUROMED (4-10 November 2014)	Bulgaria, Egypt, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, UK	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean)	"- To equip youth workers with knowledge, employable skills and creative tools related to peace education and social entrepreneurship that can be integrated in their work with other young people. - To promote social entrepreneurship as a tool for social transformation and sustainable development. - To develop a cross-cultural understanding of different youth work experiences in both European and Mediterranean countries. - To facilitate opportunities for networking and partnerships between youth workers and organizations in the Euro-Mediterranean region."	http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details-papagpage/?nodeRef=workspace://SpacesStore/743ba795-3487-4102-b049-ecbc660fcab4

Programme and/or Institution	Project name and period	Countries involved	Type of interaction	Brief description	Website
Civil Society Facility	Youth mobility and regional integration of Maghreb countries (2015-2018)	Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia	Inter-regional, Sub-regional cooperation	"The objective of the project is to foster the integration of Arab Maghreb Countries through advocating for youth cooperation and youth mobility within the region. More specifically, it aims at: establishing a regional structure representing youth organisations and likely to advocate for youth mobility in the region defining and implementing concrete programmes and propositions for improving youth mobility in the region on 3 axes: higher education (student mobility); economy and employment; cultural and sport."	http://www.euneighbours.eu/en/eu-in-action/projects/youth-mobility-and-regional-integration-maghreb-countries
ENPI, EU-LAS Cooperation	EL-HIWAR (2013-2017)	EU, LAS, Member states of the Arab league	Inter-regional	"This project aims at promoting a more effective cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the League of Arab States (LAS) by facilitating the flow of information, promotion of dialogue and cooperation between officials from EU institutions and LAS Secretariat. It foresees activities such as training and capacity building on subjects related to EU institutions, EU policies, LAS organisation and policies and the Euro-Arab partnership, training on specialised EU terminology and business English. The project will also cover short-term logistical support for the participation of nationals from Member States of LAS to events of interest to the development of the Euro-Arab partnership". Also used as a platform for other cultural activities.	http://www.euneighbours.eu/en/eu-in-action/projects/el-hiwar-training-and-information-course-euro-arab-diplomacy
ENPI CBC, EU-ALECSO, CoE Cooperation	Umayyad route (2013-2015)	Egypt, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean), Inter-regional	Tourism: "design of a cross-border itinerary between 6 countries sharing common history and cultural background."	http://umayyad.eu/
EU-UNESCO	Networks of Mediterranean Youth Project (2014-2017)	Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia.	Regional (Euro-Mediterranean)	"We provide young women and men with the necessary skills, tools and capacities to be active citizens and take part in decision-making. Our youth members take part in the development, revision and monitoring of national youth strategies and policies; the production and monitoring of youth-related media content; and the follow-up with renowned experts on employment policy development and implementation. We work with youth organizations from 10 countries along the eastern and western basins of the Mediterranean Sea. We also work with different national decision-makers."	http://www.netmedyouth.org/

Working paper

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