

EU–Russia cultural relations and identity politics

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Politicians like to declare the significance of culture and cultural cooperation for better understanding among peoples and for closer relations between countries, but cultural policy remains one of the most complicated spheres both for practice and for analysis. This chapter is devoted to the interrelations between the EU and Russia in the sphere of culture and is closely connected with the process of identity construction. It first examines the academic discourse on cultural cooperation, then the practice of EU–Russia cultural cooperation in the 1990s–2000s and the attempts to institutionalise it at the beginning of 2000s before moving on to discuss the problems in cultural dialogue existing not only because of political reasons after the 2014 events in Ukraine but also by reason of the different identity construction models of the EU and Russia.

Cultural policy and cultural dialogue/diplomacy

Analysis of communication in the sphere of culture is always complicated by both the definition of culture itself and the interpretations of culture and cultural policy (Stoicheva 2016; Vlaemink 2017). Defining the terms ‘culture’, ‘cultural policy’, ‘cultural dialogue’ and ‘cultural diplomacy’ is a challenging endeavour for researchers and in the context of sometimes diverging, sometimes overlapping understandings, it is most helpful to see how the actors being analysed talk about them. Additionally, the comparative cultural policy research area still requires development (Webb 2009; Wiesand 2002).

In terms of the political process, cultural policy does not enjoy any priority in the EU or Russia, although there have been a few initiatives. The term ‘cultural policy’ was established in the 1990s and policymaking methods included soft measures such as cooperation and coordination (Wallace 2005). Researchers note, however, a shortage of references to the intercultural dialogue even inside the European Union entity (Stoicheva 2016), notwithstanding the European Agenda for culture, proposed by the European Commission and adopted in Lisbon in 2007.

(Council of the EU 2007)

The cultural policy of the EU is connected with identity policy because one of the main purposes of cultural policy is defined as the construction of a European cultural identity. The 1973 Document on European Identity declares:

The diversity of cultures within the framework of a common European civilization, the attachment to common values and principles, the increasing convergence of attitudes to life, the awareness of having specific interests in common and the determination to take part in the construction of a United Europe, all give the European Identity its originality and its own dynamism.

(CVCE 2013)

According to Jacques Delors (President of the European Commission 1985–1995), ‘raise the question of Europe’s cultural dimension and you also have to raise that of European identity or identities’ (1999). The cultural identity of EU citizens can also be characterised as a project: ‘the unity of European culture is not so much seen in the past, rather it is projected into the future as the result of Europe acting as a singular entity’ (Stoicheva 2016, 2017).

Analysts (Stoicheva 2017; Vlaemink 2017) consider that the turn in favour of a cultural policy was made only after the Maastricht Treaty, where cultural policy was included for the ‘improvement of the knowledge and dissemination of the culture and history of the European people; conservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage of European significance; non-commercial cultural exchanges, artistic and literary creation’ (European Union 1992: 48–9). Most experts connect cultural policy with a new EU identity policy (Bennett 2001; Cerutti 2001; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; Lucarelli et al. 2011; Stoicheva 2017). The targeted identity policy, including common European citizenship and a set of EU programmes, was considered by the European public and both intellectual and civic activists to be an elite project, although the focus on the cultural manifestations of European identity was helpful for promoting EU identity politics to the wider European public (Cotta 2017).

The EU makes a lot of effort to establish a common European narrative based on a supposed common heritage and values for the building of a European identity. The term ‘identity politics’ has strong historical connotations with the fight of minority groups for their identities, so some EU experts search for a new term (Yuval-Davis 2006). Regarding the heritage discourse, they characterise ‘the initiatives that seek to identify and eventually find this kind of European shared past function as powerful tools in the EU’s identity politics’, or its ‘politics of belonging’ (Lähdesmäki 2019: 31). They understand this ‘politics of belonging’ as ‘an attempt to create discursive, performative, and emotional attachments to Europe and fellow people in Europe’ (Lähdesmäki 2019: 27).

In Russia, the goals, principles and tasks of implementing state cultural policy are presented in ‘The Fundamentals of State Cultural Policy’ approved in 2014 (Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation 2015), while ‘The Strategy of State Cultural Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030’ dates back to 2016 (Government of the Russian Federation 2016). The common point with the EU’s approach to culture is the significance of identity. The preamble to the Ministry of Culture’s report on the ‘Culture of Russia in 2012–2017’ quotes President Putin: ‘To preserve our identity is extremely important in the turbulent age of technological changes, it is impossible to overestimate the role of culture, which is our national civilizational code that unleashes human creative potential’ (cf. Efremova et al. 2018: 434).

‘Cultural diplomacy’ and ‘cultural dialogue’ are the terms used to describe how the EU and Russia interact in this area. Scholarly work here consists of comparative analysis (Bound et al. 2007)

focused on the diplomacy of the EU and Russia (Klueva and Tsetura 2015) and the coordination of values and norms between them (Headley 2012). At the same time, researchers argue cultural diplomacy can be wielded as a kind of soft power, given that culture is not neutral in form or understandings of it and is wider than any ideology (Klueva and Tsetura 2015; Vlaemink 2017; Zonova 2013).

Historical background and forms of cultural cooperation

Historically, EU–Russian cultural relations are based on long-term interactions and the mutual influence of the European and Russian cultures. Russia and EU-rope have unique historical ties, characterised in many historical and literary sources. Although in Russia an ongoing discussion exists on whether the country belongs to the Asian East or the European West, Europe and not Asia was, and still is, a mirror for the Russian intelligentsia/intellectuals with different ideological views (Fadeeva 2012). At the same time, the cultural symbols of Russia are still interesting, even exciting, for (other) European people. Belyaeva (2012) proposes analysing the practical cooperation between Russia and EU countries at two levels, the classic and the modern. The first level traditionally considers cultural those symbols of Russia which are clearly recognisable and which have enjoyed constant interest. The second level of cooperation can be attributed to the cultural symbols of Russia as a modern country (Belyaeva 2012).

Cultural cooperation is examined in numerous publications devoted to the bilateral relations of Russia with European countries or are connected with that subject (Belyaeva 2012; David et al. 2013), reflecting the long history of relations between Russia and many of the EU member states. Most basic agreements between the Russian Federation and countries of the EU were signed before the implementation of the Russia–EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1997 (exceptions being agreements with Romania [1999] and with Slovenia [2000]). Bilateral agreements included the possibility of cultural initiatives. They created the legal basis for the cooperation of museums and galleries, theatres, cultural centres, the organisation of joint exhibitions, festivals of Russian culture in Europe and vice versa. Such arrangements made way, naturally, for the emergence of new actors, too (Zamorano 2016). One of the most important public spaces for civic discussion, including cultural cooperation, was established by the *Petersburg Dialogue*, launched in 2001 on the joint initiative of the Russian President and Chancellor of Germany. Twelve centres of the *Alliance Française* were opened in various cities of Russia in 2000–2012. In 2006, the Russian cluster of the EUNIC (*European Union National Institute for Culture*) began its operations in Moscow; members are represented by the Austrian Cultural Forum, British Council, German Cultural Centre of Goethe, the Embassy of Sweden and French Institute in Russia.

Classical forms of cooperation in culture are therefore now combined with interactions in the field of modern art, which is accompanied by the creation of a new generation of actors in cultural policy, effectively what can be called ‘cultural curators’.

The institutional framework of cultural dialogue

While bilateral cooperation preceded EU–Russian relations in the sphere of culture, efforts were made early on by both Moscow and Brussels to institutionalise and systematise cultural relations. Article 85 of the Russia–EU PCA of 1994 is devoted to cultural cooperation, which is described as the ‘exchange of information and experience in the field of conservation and protection of monuments and sites (architectural heritage), to cultural exchanges between institutions, artists and other persons working in the area of culture, translation of literary works’

(EU and Russia 1994). Cooperation in this area would receive various institutional boosts in future years, although whether to any effect is highly arguable.

At the beginning of the 2000s, cultural dialogue between Russia and the EU was planned as a systematic interaction and several events supported in the hope of establishing a real dialogue. At the St. Petersburg Summit of May 2003, cultural aspects were included in one of the four common spaces of cooperation between the EU and Russia. The 2005 Roadmap for the Common Space on Research, Education and Culture identified ways to implement cooperation in the field of culture and set the following objectives:

To promote a structured approach to cultural cooperation between the enlarged EU and Russia, to foster the creativity and mobility of artists, public access to culture, the dissemination of art and culture, intercultural dialogue and knowledge of the history and cultural heritage of the people of Europe.

(EU and Russia 2005)

The link between cultural dialogue and identity construction was emphasised. The authors of the Roadmap clarified their understanding of European identity as a phenomenon based on common values combined with the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity. The document considers the necessity 'to develop cooperation between the cultural industries of the EU and Russia in order to increase both their cultural and economic impact' (EU and Russia 2005).

The European Agenda for Culture was adopted as a Commission Communication in May 2007 and endorsed by the Ministers of Culture in November 2007 (Council of the EU 2007) and by the European Council in December 2007 (European Council 2007). On 25 October 2007, the first Permanent Partnership Council (PPC) adopted a joint statement between the EU and Russia, which called for 'the organisation of a high-level conference to promote contacts between EU and the Russian Federation cultural operators' (EU and Russia 2007). The EU–Russia Joint Working Group during the 3rd Meeting supported the proposal. The European Council and Russia agreed to organise a joint high-level conference in autumn 2009 involving cultural agencies and cultural operators from the EU and Russia.

Experts considered the best result the organisation of the so-called 'cross-cultural years' and international seminars as 'Russia–EU signs on a road map of cultural cooperation' (Russia–EU 2009). It was a time of hope for closer cooperation between the EU and Russia, and intensive discussions at the seminar were devoted to the role of culture both for the countries involved and for international cooperation. Daniil Dondurey, editor-in-chief of the journal *Art of Cinema* and a respected Russian film critic, declared: 'I feel as if we are entering a fundamentally new area – the creation of a common cultural space with Europe'. He believed that the most important issue would be common understanding, and only then could discussions on management and cultural programmes begin (Dondurey 2009). Kirill Razlogov, Director of the Russian Institute of Art History, confirmed that effects had been felt in the form of changes in the public perception of culture's role in society in recent years: culture could be a welcome addition to attempts to create a good neighbourhood or to preserve and enhance cooperation. He warned, however, that a conflict-free future based on cultural exchange alone is impossible and that culture could itself be a *source* of conflict.

Culture in Europe (and everywhere else) is the main factor not just of mutual understanding, but of discord as well. . . . Conflict between civilizations burst onto the scene at the turn of the century as well. Culture replaced prevailing perceptions of universal peace with politics and ideology in becoming a source of conflict.

(Razlogov 2009)

Razlogov's forecast was prescient, although arguably the insufficiency of the accompanying structural change played its part. Even in a positive era of relations between the EU and Russia, the cultural dialogue was not institutionalised; declarations were formulated in very general terms; special institutions were not established; the EU–Russia Joint Working Group could not prepare a plan for cultural cooperation. The rise of international tension and the worsening of the relations between Russia and EU after 2014 served to influence all aspects of cooperation between the two actors even more negatively.

Identity politics impact on cultural dialogue between EU and Russia

Both in EU and RF documents/statements and in academic literature, there is a strong link between cultural policy and identity construction. The main point of the discussions on European identity is the idea that a political community needs a common set of values and references to ensure its coherence, to guide its actions and to endow them with legitimacy and meaning. The critical point of view on European identity construction has been ably explained, acknowledging the fact that it is an elite (political rather than cultural) project.

Monnet's apocryphal sentence – that he should really have started with culture – is ritually invoked by those who see the Union's prime deficit as a lack of meaning and an ability to inspire loyalty, or even just 'enthusiasm'. Intellectuals, so the argument goes, should catch up with a project that was implemented without them – but which now desperately needs them to articulate reasons for its further progress (and, ideally, a master narrative that justifies its past, its present and its future all at once).

(Muller 2012)

The identity question in Europe is closely related to the democratic legitimacy deficit, European citizenship, the European constitution and the increasing importance of regional identities (Selker 2004). This is due mainly to the work of those intellectuals who have analysed the processes of European identity construction, critiqued policies of identity and searched for ways to construct it in a more democratic style (Fossum 2001; Lucarelli et al. 2011). The main kind of intellectual activity is academic analysis of European integration, EU politics and governance, the European public and so on; with respect to European identity, this analysis includes the definition of identity, the correspondence between European and national identities and the background and foundations of a European identity (cultural, historical, political) (Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; Cotta 2017).

European intellectuals have also been important activists, organising various actions like collective appeals against the Iraq war (from February to May 2003, protests took place in numerous capitals, such as London and Rome), for the political unity of the EU (January 2013) and in support of the Maidan in Kyiv (January 2014). What is especially important is that these intellectuals can differ in their aesthetic, philosophic or other points of view but nevertheless unite in their efforts to promote the humanistic traditions of Europe. In some aspects, they are severe critics of EU policy, attributing the current crisis the EU finds itself in to the result of the crisis of the neoliberal model (and global capitalism) (Badieu 2005; Žižek 2015) or as a crisis of German 'ordoliberalism' and Eurocrats (Habermas 2012). But Euro-optimism, as opposed to Euro-scepticism, gives them the hope of being able to reassess the European project, which is 'not merely an institutional fantasy' (Habermas 2012). Their analytical reports and conclusions have become the subject of public discussions which can be vibrant, especially in times of

crisis. Intellectuals can raise their voices loud enough to be heard by both the public and politicians. Public intellectuals influence the debates on a European identity as a non-zero-sum game between European and national identities, and they are able to create influential intellectual communities. The ideas and opinions of people like Jurgen Habermas, Umberto Eco, Slavoy Zizek, Zigmunt Bauman and others are discussed in the public space. In a Habermasian understanding, the European public is a community of people with a civic identity and with influence over the political agenda keeping Europe alive as ‘an active utopia’ (Bauman 2014). This is a liberal picture of a European identity and European public built on a common historical basis. Such thought influences the understanding of Europe as a specific civilisation which is important for cultural cooperation (Ferrari and Tafuro Ambrosetti 2018). That the cultural heritage of Russia is a component of European culture would seem undeniable when seen through the lens of its cultural heroes, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Tchaikovsky, to name but a few, and supporting, therefore, the more positive view of Dondurey about ‘a common cultural space’.

Yet there is a difference between a civic identity based on political principles versus cultural feelings of belonging (Eco 2012). Intellectuals, on the one hand, participate in various think tanks and help to define political identity; on the other hand, they have, again and again, reconstructed the tension between their vision of a good society and the political order. The classical division between intellectuals on the left and those on the right is connected with their political positions, for example, their attitude towards the welfare state, the multicultural model and the right to be different and to oppose. New demarcation lines were constructed after the so-called ‘big bang’ enlargement of Europe in 2004. Intellectuals in the new member states from East Central Europe were not ready to follow the older member state pattern of memory/heritage politics and demanded a re-writing of the historical narrative. They were not unwilling to sit as a corner-stone of memory on the Second World War Holocaust and have achieved recognition as the victims of two totalitarian regimes and in equating the Soviet regime with the Nazis in terms of their effects. Another point of division inside the EU and their intellectuals was created by the migrant crisis stimulating the rise of right-wing political forces in Europe (Bluhm 2019a).

In his edited collection delivering a comparative analysis of intellectuals, Gagnon (1987) called on them to avoid a moralising tone and proposed using the terms ‘lions’ and ‘foxes’ with respect to intellectuals: ‘lions’ (liberals) try to change the order; ‘foxes’ (conservatives) try to keep it. Such a demarcation helps to escape a solely normative approach whereby the opponents of certain ideas are simply accused of being dishonest people. This is especially important now in the context of identity politics and the polarisation of debate. For new conservatives are not ‘foxes’ trying to keep the status quo. They pursue radical change in politics, including in relation to identity. Their struggle is against the multicultural and ‘political correctness’ model they regard as supported by EU. The Amsterdam-based Centre for European Renewal (CER) in May 2017 published a document entitled *The Paris Declaration: A Europe We Can Believe in*, which provides a good glimpse of the basis on which European conservatives cooperate across borders. Written by ten European conservative intellectuals, the document treats ‘Russian adventurism’ and ‘Muslim immigration’ as threats to Europe, second to what they see as a far greater threat, ‘the false Europe’ of multiculturalism, reneging on its Christianity (Bluhm and Varga 2019). In the contemporary world, the construction of identity is politicised by the efforts of both politicians and public intellectuals. Despite the differences between the new right and liberal/left political forces in the EU on the question of what constitutes Europe, there is some mutually strong consideration of what Europe is not. The promotion of Europe’s identity and ‘cultural heritage turns into a promotion of values – and eventually into a promotion of liberal democratic social and political order’ (Lähdesmäki 2019: 32). After 2014, Russia is assessed by the EU as an authoritarian state; consequently it is excluded from the European space, even

the cultural one. In this way, European cultural identity has become a new line of demarcation between the EU and Russia.

At the same time, in Russia, Conservative public intellectuals have created the ideological field, network and meta-frame of a new Conservatism with an anti-Western and anti-European spirit. The key factor in this process is connected with 'the return of the self-identity problem and thoughts about geopolitical space' (Bluhm 2019b: 27). In 2013, Putin 'asserted in his annual state of the nation a morally conservative world-view in opposition to the West's liberal one, exposing Russia's willingness to fight against what it considered to be the West's normative imperialism' (Ferrari and Tafuro Ambrosetti 2018: 138). In Russia, there is some (not an entire) consensus of politicians, including the Kremlin elite and Conservative public intellectuals (Dugin, Prokhanov, Prilepin, Mikhalkov), in criticising the European Union not only for political but also for cultural reasons. They utilise the mass media to declare the loss of Europe's civilisational role, the threat to Christian values, destroying European traditions and culture. Their message correlates with the views and declarations of right-wing parties in Europe, in Hungary and Poland particularly (Buzogány and Varga 2019). All of them emphasise the crisis of the European Union and European politics as a result of ill-advised politics on the part of EU elites.

In the new version of Russian identity politics, intellectuals are invited to participate in the construction of the idea of the Russian civilisation, its distinct manner of development, Christian values and a Russian model of statehood. Conservative ideologists propose changing the interpretation of basic values: instead of human rights – pravda (righteousness), instead of democratisation – the real power of people (Bluhm 2019b: 43). Conservative ideas are spread by means of culture: articles, books, films, television programmes. The film director Nikita Mikhalkov leads a television programme 'Besogon' (Exorcist) on the channel of the Russian Orthodox Church; the writer Zakhar Prilepin is the author and presenter of the television programme 'The Lessons of the Russian', where he teaches the lessons of Russian patriotism with a large portion of anti-Europeanism.

The polarising nature of identity politics in Russia and at least parts of the EU creates a new obstacle for cultural dialogue. A new conservative turn in Russia has a certain anti-European character. Europe is portrayed as the eternal enemy of Russia. The new Russian identity politics defines Russia as the last bastion of Christian values which have been lost in Europe. This kind of identity politics contributes to the transformation of culture into a divisive factor rather than a unifying force.

Actors in EU–Russia cultural diplomacy today

The Ministry of Culture of Russia (2015) notes the organisation of complex events of international cultural cooperation, such as Years, Seasons and Days of Russian Culture abroad, various Festivals of Culture and Arts and so on. Analysts of cultural cooperation describe some good results from the 'cross cultural years' which were organised in EU countries and Russia (the last one was the 2016 year of Russian culture in Greece and Greek culture in Russia), as well as other events such as festivals, exhibitions, conferences and seminars. Vlaemink (2017) specifies good examples of cultural cooperation, including international festivals and exhibitions in the field of music (e.g. 'Europe through the Eyes of the Russians, Russia through the Eyes of Europeans'), cinema (e.g. the '27+One' festival), theatre (e.g. the 'Caravan of the World' festival) and architecture (e.g. the 'Mosconstruct' project). The exchange programme called 'Europe through the Eyes of the Russians, Russia through the Eyes of the Europeans' was promoted by Vladimir Tarnopolski, a well-known composer and professor of music at the Moscow Conservatory. This

project received EU sponsorship and the support of cultural centres and educational institutions in Austria, Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom. A group of nine European composers wrote music related to Russia and its culture and history, while the same number of Russian composers dedicated their compositions to the nine European countries just listed (Vlaemink 2017).

Classical forms of cultural cooperation between Russia and the EU such as tours and concerts, exhibitions and publishing activities are still being maintained, even after the events of 2014 which have seen so many other forms of cooperation halted (as many other chapters in this collection illustrate). For instance, a range of cultural events in 2016–2018 was organised, and the Russian Ministry of Culture initiated a new international cultural project ‘The Russian seasons of XXI Century’. In 2018, cultural events of the Russian seasons were held in Italy. 2019 was the year for Germany: the season began at the Berlin Philharmonic on 7 January 2019 with a performance of the opera ‘Iolanta’ by Pyotr Tchaikovsky, under the direction of the Artistic Director of the Mariinsky Theatre, Valery Gergiev. In 2020, France will be the host country for the seasons project.

Cultural cooperation is also supported by regions, for example, in November 2018, the Perm region held the Week of Sicilia. The annual Dyagilev festival in the Perm Theatre of Opera and Ballet has become a great cultural event in recent years, thanks to the cooperation of Greek musical conductor Teodor Currentzis, who was an artistic director of the Perm theatre in 2011–2019, along with other famous cultural figures of Europe. The Diaghilev Festival in Perm usually includes a set of cultural events; in recent years, they included the premiere of the dramatic oratorio ‘Jeanne d’Arc au bucher’ by Arthur Honegger, directed by one of the most sought-after and talked-about directors in the world, Romeo Castellucci; avant-garde ballet ‘Nicht Schlafen’, created by the famous Belgian choreographer Alan Platel; and educational and club programmes.

Nongovernmental organisations funded by both public and private foundations actively participate in cultural diplomacy. Two public organisations are the main implementers of cultural diplomacy efforts: the Russian Association for International Cooperation (RAMS), established in 1992, and the Russkiy Mir Foundation, established in 2007 (Klueva and Tsetsura 2015). Their work successfully targets Russian-speaking diasporas in the European Union; such NGOs have become powerful actors of cultural dialogue, though this targeting of the Russian diaspora suggests a line of division.

The main efforts to promote cultural interrelations now belong to directors of museums and theatres, to the authorities responsible for cultural relations between EU and Russian regions, to cultural figures, the so-called ‘ambassadors of culture’. This suggests analysis would do well to compare cultural diplomacy with second-track diplomacy because it is realised by experts more than by state figures and institutions. Directors of large museums always search for cultural connections around the world. Mikhail Piotrovsky, Director of the Hermitage, considers the museum the most democratic institution in the world because it provides for the dialogue of cultures and even claims that the ‘Hermitage is a geopolitical player as well’ (cf. Kishkovsky 2019). If museums can indeed be players in the international arena, the role of their directors as actors of cultural diplomacy is understandable.

Conclusion

Both the historical heritage of culture and the long-term experience of bilateral cultural cooperation between Russia and the EU member states give hope for the institutionalisation of EU–Russian cultural dialogue. The creation of the cultural policy approach in both the EU and

Russia has influenced their attempts to institutionalise their relations (Sidorova 2014; Vodopyanova 2016). Political factors, however, have had an impeding effect, and the institutionalisation process was suspended (Meszaros 2016; Mulcahy 2017). In this way, the identity politics as constructed by politicians and public intellectuals creates a new obstacle for cultural cooperation.

At the same time, cultural links are preserved and developed in other forms, based on bilateral cooperation between Russia and the EU member states, between twinned cities and regions, between museums, galleries, theatres and so on. It is not an exaggeration to say that every week (if not every day) in the cities of Russia, cultural events take place that are connected with European partners and European subject matter. New actors have been involved in the process, such as regional authorities and centres and NGOs (although their activity is targeted at particular spheres of culture, i.e. the support of Russian compatriots abroad). Now analysts have started saying that Russia–EU relations will have to focus on nonpolitical issues for the time being, from business ventures and technology transfers to humanitarian and cultural issues (Trenin 2019), although others have pointed out that such exchanges have long been a part of EU–Russia relations (e.g. David et al. 2013).

The main role in cultural cooperation/cultural diplomacy between Russia and the EU belongs today to cultural figures and experts who propose contemporary forms of cooperation. Cultural diplomacy of the second track could keep cultural ties between EU and Russia afloat in time of troubles and hopefully in the long run will contribute to mutual understanding and an increase of mutual trust.

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