

**“Diversity makes the Difference -
European Foreign Policy and Culture”**

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**« CULTURAL CO-OPERATION AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE PARTNERSHIP
BETWEEN THE EU AND AFRICA »**

1. Brief historical context

Formal cultural cooperation between the EU and Africa is more than 20 years old! In fact, it was in 1984 during the adoption of the 3rd Lomé Convention when cultural cooperation was formally integrated through Article 131. In 1984 the European Community had not yet been given the legal basis for cultural action on the community level (this only became the case in 1992 with Article 128 of the Treaty of Maastricht).

The Cotonou Agreement (June 2002), in Article 27 concerning “Social and Human Development”, emphasises “recognising, preserving and promoting cultural values and identities and the value of cultural heritage” on the one hand, and “developing cultural industries and enhancing market access opportunities for cultural goods and services” on the other hand.

2. Present Situation

It would be wrong to say that over the last 20 years, nothing has been done. But one must say that this “cooperation” is more “aid for projects” than authentic cooperation. Intra-African cultural cooperation is being developed as are the cultural relations between Europe and Africa, even if they remain largely asymmetrical. Progress has been made, notably in the film, audiovisual and cultural industry. For example, the PDACI (Programme for the Development of Artistic and Cultural Initiatives) and the PSCI (Programme in Support of Cultural Initiatives) have provided valuable help to artists as well as to the creation of cultural actors and the creative process itself.

However, it is important to recognise that the results obtained to date have not achieved the desired expectations, especially those of African artists and cultural actors.

What explains this relative failure?

I see two basic reasons:

- On one side, cultural cooperation has not been considered a priority in internal relations between the EU and ACP countries, and neither by Europeans nor by Africans. Culture Ministers, who should have been promoting this cooperation, are far from the decision-making processes ensuring cooperation between the EU and ACP countries;

- On the other side, EU-ACP cultural cooperation does not contain implementation mechanisms, contrary to what has been done, e.g. between Europe and Asia, notably with the Asia-Europe Foundation (which relies on the 27 EU countries and 12 Asian countries).

3. Perspectives

The two meetings of Culture Ministers of ACP countries (i) Dakar, June 2003, with the adoption of the “Dakar Plan of Action for the Promotion of ACP Cultures and Cultural Industries”; and ii) Santo Domingo, October 2006, which advocated for the creation of an ACP Cultural Foundation and for strengthening the Observatory for Cultural Policies in Maputo), but above all the official establishment, the 18th of March, of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression, which should provide new dynamism to cultural cooperation between the EU and Africa, for which cultural cooperation must be fully integrated into EU foreign policies as well as in development cooperation policies.

It would be advisable to increase the role of civil society actors and particularly the role of cultural networks, which would facilitate the following (and I am quoting only a few of the proposals made by the Dakar Plan of Action):

- Culture must be restored to its role of underpinning development;
- Creativity in all its forms must be reassessed;
- Theoretical options must be translated into operational programmes;
- Culture must become a development priority;
- Training and improvement programmes must be used to build the capacities of private and institutional operators.

1. Historical background

Since the 1980s, the cultural sector, through the Mexico Declaration of UNESCO (1982) and the Cultural Decade stressed the objectives of culture and the cultural dimension of development. This recognition of the cultural dimension in all development policies finds its consecration today in the adoption of the Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (UNESCO, Paris, October 2005).

The development community has for a long time remained reticent with regards to culture, considering it a problem or an obstacle to development instead of an investment and an opportunity. It was the World Bank, through its events on “the power of culture”, the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) and, above all, the UNDP’s Human Development Report “cultural liberty in a diversified world” (2004) which created a paradigm shift by juxtaposing culture with development.

I am convinced that we can learn a lot from the strategic thinking already carried out concerning the interaction between culture and development policies concerning the cultural influence in the EU’s foreign policy.

2. Present Situation

This gap between culture and development has been brought to the forefront by the European Union, in particular in their relationship with ACP countries. They were ready, surely, to promote the cultural sector and to develop cultural cooperation between Africa and Europe, but realising the cultural dimension of development, if it existed at all, remained only in discourse, for example, in the 1st line of Article 27 of the Cotonou Agreement, which states clearly: “Cooperation in the area of culture shall aim at integrating the cultural dimension at all levels of development cooperation”.

The UNESCO Convention refers to culture, insisting on “the need to incorporate culture as a strategic element in national and international development cooperation” (Preamble).

The European Union seems today to want to make up for lost time: although they do not refer to the cultural dimension of development at all, neither in the “European Consensus” nor in the Strategy for Africa (2005), they seem to grant great importance to the Draft Communication on the new roles of culture and in preparation for the Year 2008 dedicated to intercultural dialogue.

3. Perspectives

Along with the text on UNESCO’s Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions as well as their new thematic programme for foreign aid “Investing in people” (2007-2013), today the EU adheres to a “cultural charter” which is needed in order to create a new development cooperation approach, one that places culture, and especially *cultures*, at the heart of the development process.

There is a sense of intensifying links between human development, socio-cultural issues, cultural heritage and diversity (identity, values, beliefs) and cultural forms of expression (popular arts and media activities) which have not yet been fully connected and mapped out.

Certainly these connections exist in numerous examples in development, community participation and the arts sectors throughout the world. This year, the Sahel and West Africa Club will try, together with ECOWAS and other partners, to map out the different resources that exist in West Africa and among these, the cultural and social resources. We also intend to develop ideas and tools that will lead to new perspectives for West Africa on the interplay of culture and development.

This means considering:

- Culture as a development context (the socio-politico-cultural environment that needs to be taken into account in development activity);
- Culture as a content of development (the content of local languages, practices, objects or traditions);
- Culture as a method within development (the medium or cultural forms that programmes may use in order to address development issues);
- Culture as an expression (expression is fundamental to self-determination, community engagement and to imagining futures).

Cultural approaches are being applied in the development arena in two obvious ways: as a tool (generally message-based) and as a process. They start from people's own experiences and involve a participatory creative process, the output of which is not pre-determined.

Similarly, we can contribute to reforming foreign policy within the EU and in the different member states and, just maybe, succeed on the international level to include culture and art as an additional UN Millennium Development Goal.