

Conflict resolution through cultural and civil society initiatives?

Setting the right framework

Function: Roundtable discussion

Time: December 7, 2011 | 1.30 p.m. – 5.30 p.m. | Brussels

Place: State Representation Baden-Württemberg to EU, Rue Belliard 60-62, 1040 Brussels

Organisation: ifa in cooperation with EUNIC-cluster Brussels

Documentation: Dr. Dietrich Heißenbüttel, journalist and art critic

Conference report

At the invitation of the Institute for Foreign Cultural Relations (ifa) and the European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC), 80 experts from the fields of conflict transformation, cultural affairs, civil society and EU foreign and security affairs met for a roundtable discussion in Brussels on December 7, 2011. The roundtable focused on the role of cultural institutes in promoting peace in conflict and post-conflict regions, in establishing cultural dialogues and in working to rebuild civil infrastructure through creative and educational programmes.

The meeting was divided into two parts. In the first part of the discussion, cultural activists and experts in conflict resolution and peace building shared their experiences, presenting best-practice projects and expressing their views and demands. In the second half, experts from the fields of cultural relations, EU foreign and security policy and research organisations focused on the role of cultural institutes in European foreign policy.

Overall, the conference examined the long-term impact of cultural and civil society initiatives and the effectiveness of cultural and educational tools for conflict resolution. In what ways can EUNIC best use its cultural relations expertise and its extensive networks for conflict resolution? How might these networks better cooperate and work together with civil society initiatives? How might they communicate their knowledge to decision makers in order to develop a more effective, integrated approach to EU peace building efforts?

Cultural institutes of EU member states are increasing efforts to work in the area of conflict prevention and peace building. But as ifa's Secretary General Ronald Grätz pointed out in his introductory remarks: "As experts of cultural relations, what do we actually know about the contribution of culture to conflict transformation? Are we acting based on knowledge or simply on long-standing beliefs and hopes?" To date, the methodologies used to assess the effects and the impact of cultural and educational tools on conflict resolution remain largely ill-defined. Detecting a lack of cooperation between institutes of culture and conflict resolution organisations, Grätz raised the question whether institutes of culture are acknowledged as credible actors or not.

EUNIC President Ana-Paula Laborinho stressed that EUNIC projects are not created as patronising, top-down ideas but as projects conceived from the bottom-up. In her view, it is of the utmost importance for

EUNIC to be recognised and accepted as a credible partner in EU foreign cultural relations. Laborinho referred to new EUNIC clusters established in Brazil, Russia, India, China, the USA and Canada, as well as in the Middle East and North Africa. She also reported from a recent meeting in Rabat, Morocco, where participants emphasised the importance of projects not being developed by European institutes *for* other countries but in cooperation *with* local partners. “Listening,” she emphasised, “was the most important word in this meeting.”

Sharing experiences and best practice

The role of culture in the Arab Spring

Moukhtar Kocache began by describing the work of the Ford Foundation, which he works for in the Middle East and North Africa. Founded in the 1950s, the Foundation is involved in social justice and philanthropic work, promoting projects and initiatives all over the world to the tune of 525 million dollars in 2010. According to Kocache, civil society in the Middle East and North Africa has developed strongly since the launch of the Foundation’s Arts & Culture programme around 20 years ago. He mentioned the Foundation’s support for all kinds of artistic expression, for the promotion of festivals and events, for developing an infrastructure for long-term sustainable programmes. He also emphasised the funding of art spaces that have been “probably the most dynamic and energetic centres in the region” and “an incredible success.” Further, the Foundation has also supported Palestinian arts education. Kocache’s office is only a stone’s throw away from Tahrir square in Cairo. He therefore experienced and continues to experience the demonstrations first hand. “If there is one single factor that is important for the uprising, it is *expression*,” says Kocache. Expression has resulted in the emergence of a new public sphere. There are a great number of projects, often quite small, in need of support. To determine which project is worthy of funding, reading between the lines and “sometimes a little bit of alchemy is needed.” He proposes that an international think tank be set up to draft a “Manifesto to the North,” from the Southern Mediterranean to the North. In Kocache’s view the term conflict must be expanded: “Culture *is* conflict,” he says. And he argues that Europe, “when London’s burning, when Athens is burning, with a third generation of immigrants, is very much in conflict at this moment.” For him, culture, in the first instance, is a set of values and ethics. The question is: “What must be changed in order to minimise conflict?”

“Culture must be part of the foreign policy framework”

Talking about her experiences in Kabul, Jemima Montagu from the London-based venture Culture + Conflict, stressed the need for documentation and research in order to collect and share knowledge. “Why culture?” Montagu asked. Her response: because the arts transcend cultural boundaries, are able to elicit understanding and empathy, to view the familiar in a new way and to engender collaboration. She confronted the question of the impact of cultural initiatives by asking: “What impact can military, politics or economics achieve?” She says that evidence as to what certain projects can accomplish is needed, although she pointed to the impact of two particular projects. The first is “The Great Game: Afghanistan”, a series of short plays about the history of the country since the first Anglo-Afghan War around 1840, premiered at the Tricycle Theatre in London in 2009 and then staged in various cities in the United States. A better understanding of history, as presented in the plays, might have contributed to

the avoidance of many mistakes, as evidenced by the statement of former NATO general Sir David Richards, who said: "The plays would have made me a much better commander." The second project involves the Turquoise Mountain Foundation, within which Montagu and others set up an Institute of Afghan Arts and Architecture. It provided advice on the restoration of Murad Khane, a district in the old city of Kabul. The preservation of cultural heritage can help overcome trauma and re-establish self-esteem. Culture must be part of a foreign policy framework, argued Montagu, and in order to achieve this, one must combat isolation, build up networks, research and publish information.

Moral imagination

Susan Koscis, from the international conflict transformation and peace-building NGO Search for Common Ground, stressed the need for cultural initiatives even in the most violent surroundings. In Ciudad Juarez in Mexico, the most violent city in the world with 4000 murders in 2010, Koscis says she experienced how opera provided the inhabitants with the only relief in untenable circumstances. In her introductory remarks, moderator Andrea Horakh from Deutsche Welle had alluded to the ambiguous uses of culture, pointing out that radio programmes in Rwanda, between the music of rock band Nazareth and sports reports, had broadcast instigations to murder. Koscis, conversely, referring to her experience in Burundi, made the observation that radio, as well as soap opera, can also be a "very effective medium" for healing trauma. She defined peace building as a "moral imagination capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist, what politics have failed to attain." What is needed, in her view, is to create space for people to express themselves. Thus, the questions that must be addressed are: What can the arts attain and how? Which art form is best suited to the situation? "Art works at a symbolic, emotional, and metaphorical level and can therefore not fully be rationalised." Stories are the ways in which humans perceive their experience. It is necessary to "unlock our stories," according to Koscis, quoting from a theatre project in Peru. Nonetheless, culture remains marginalised in the peace process. Koscis proposed, among other ideas, an annual conference, a global support network and training curricula. She also supported the idea of a think tank.

Culture and trauma: a model

Gudrun Kramer is from the German Society for International Cooperation (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ), a federal agency that supports German Government objectives in international sustainable development work. She presented a model for the relationship between violence and culture, focussing on the Naqba, the expulsion of 800,000 to 900,000 Palestinians from the newly founded state of Israel in 1948. (She apologised for not being able to present other examples or experiences.) "When people, in their life's planning meet an external contradiction which makes it impossible for them to achieve their goals, the result is an unresolved conflict which may lead to de-humanising of others," explained Kramer. She presented a diagram illustrating the relations between society and history, and then asked: "Where is culture in all this?" Her response: It is within the norms and values of society, in internalised shared meaning. If you asked Palestinian refugees of any generation about the most beautiful thing they might ever achieve, she asserted, everyone would answer: to return home. Culture is "the coping mechanism for trauma on a collective level." The question is whether it is a culture of revenge, of forgiveness, of justice or of mutual understanding. What is needed, then, is a culture that will lead to re-humanisation. But any solution "ignoring power

relations” will fail to achieve its goals. Therefore, it is necessary to create safe spaces in the first place. Drawing a triangle around three terms – human being, culture and structure (the institutionalised relations of society) – Kramer explained that certain goals can be approached at each level but, as far as Palestinian refugees are concerned, one particular approach is more helpful in each situation. GIZ tries to help people in the Gaza strip individually, as human beings; refugees living in Jordan need assistance with regard to their (cultural) identity, including help with passports; while those in the West Bank can be supported at a societal level.

Literature is making an impact

Juliet Schofield from International Alert, a charity and international non-governmental organisation working to prevent and end violent conflict across the globe, described her experience in the conflict between Georgia and the renegade provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where she was instrumental in publishing the first edition of the South Caucasus Literary Almanac in September 2011. Works by renowned writers from the region have been collected in one book for the first time. This not only presupposes collaboration between authors but also the engendering of a cross-cultural dialogue. There is a whole generation of young people on both sides of the conflict who have no experience whatsoever with the enemy. The result is a cementing of stereotypes. The stories selected for the almanac, based on different criteria such as intrinsic value or literary impact, offer to provide people in the region with “more objective information,” and to help them to overcome stereotyping. In a presentation in South Ossetia, shortly before the most recent elections, one person remarked: “We’ve forgotten how to communicate with each other.” This observation, for Schofield, proves that the almanac is in fact making an impact already, although there is always a risk of it being exploited by one side or the other.

Art can polarise or build bridges

Martina Fischer from Berghof Conflict Research, a think tank operating at the interface between conflict research and peace policy, started by naming different potentials attributable to cultural initiatives in situations of conflict. Some of these include the ability to anticipate developments, to unveil situations of power or to establish connections. It is essential, however, to insist on the autonomy of art and its reflective role. Fischer stressed the need to consider the kind of cultural format best suited to each situation. The question, in her view, is not so much what culture can achieve but, more modestly, to create space for alternative ideas and approaches. Art can polarise or build bridges. There are sometimes “islands of success” whose impact on the conflict as a whole is difficult to judge. It is better not to categorise but to establish forums for a better mutual understanding. Because success is difficult to measure one should re-think evaluation methods. Cultural initiatives should be combined with other approaches, although Fischer warned against standardisation: “The criteria measure should be left to people involved in the process.”

Building strategic partnerships for conflict resolution – proposals

The need for and the difficulties of evaluation

In the second part of the roundtable politicians and decision makers were able to express their views and opinions. After an introduction by Philippe Peyredieu du Charlat, offering his perspectives and experience from the European Commission on the role of culture in conflict resolution, Franziska Brantner discussed the problem of budgets. Brantner, the foreign policy expert of the German Greens Party in the European Parliament, would prefer to achieve peace instead of merely security. One of the problems, in her view, is that civil society actors need to be able to work on long-term projects while funding is usually decided upon in two-year cycles. Among the measures she proposes to deal with the problems are training sessions for politicians that not only include hard political facts but also cultural factors, as well as a European Peace Institute. “If there is one positive side to the financial crisis then it is that it becomes apparent that conflict prevention is less expensive than war,” she says. Nonetheless, evaluation is a necessity: “Taxpayers want to know where the money goes.” Therefore measures of conflict management should be accompanied by supervision and coaching.

Damien Helly from the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), which focuses on conflict prevention, crisis management and linkages between security, development and governance, addressed the need for cultural advisors in EU delegations abroad. The input of cultural factors in the establishment of peaceful solutions, according to Helly, is difficult to measure. He quoted the example of Macedonia, the only part of the former Yugoslavia where there has been no full-scale war, not least because of cultural policy. Successful measures, it seems, tend to remain invisible, a paradox that must be kept in mind when conducting an evaluation. Helly also warned against over-estimating the potential of cultural activities: “We should not try to replace negotiation with culture.” Focussing on conflict transformation would be too ambitious an aim for EUNIC; one should continue to work in different countries where, for instance, a lot of expertise on the subject of stereotypes has been assembled. Helly touched on a serious problem when he asked: “How do we relate to the use of violence?” There is a certain ambiguity involved when countries first wage wars and then promote peace activities. Cultural policy, he warned, can also be a way of maintaining hegemony. Therefore, a values-based approach is needed, as well as an intensified dialogue with human rights organisations in Brussels. “Everything that’s being done is already prevention,” says Helly. Artists who deal with issues of conflict on stage are in need of funding; there is enough to do in helping people through and after conflict.

Useful initiatives: how to proceed

“We should remain active in conflict but not take a stance,” declared EUNIC Global Director Luciano Rispoli. Some 40-50 years ago, who would have thought it would be possible to bring Germany, France and Poland together? Rispoli underlined the experiences assembled in this historical process, while conceding the challenges the world faced in Afghanistan, Gaza or Zimbabwe. He ended with a plea for the importance of a cultural approach: “I don’t want to ask ‘why culture?’ No one would say ‘why weapons?’” EUNIC Vice President Delphine Borione in turn remarked that every conflict is avoidable. What is needed is access to basic human rights and the supporting of artistic initiatives. She recalled a number of useful initiatives like the re-opening of Iraq’s National Theatre in 2009, artists exchanges in general, the need to empower civil society, to work on cultural heritage, to mediate between

communities, medical help, to provide training in good governance and economic development. Culture, in her view, is a key factor in all of this; evaluation would help provide a better understanding of the results and effectiveness of cultural measures.

Martin Eichtinger from the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs said one needs to be clear on aims in order to achieve goals. He sees cultural institutes occupying a favourable position because they are detached from political institutions, working on cross-cultural visibility, with a focus on the media. He warned against exaggerated expectations: “We will *not* replace the fire brigade.” He called for “little strokes, big oaks.” European cultural institutes should focus on their neighbours; North Africa in the first place and perhaps Eastern Europe. “A clear roadmap, tools, and best project plans are required,” says Eichtinger. Cultural relations must always take place on an equal footing, eye to eye, open and with respect. There must be no hegemony. The dialogue of cultures, in his view, starts at home, in dealing with issues of domestic migration. Austria, for instance, has begun to train Muslim imams.

Next steps

The variety of experiences presented by speakers from different fields – theatre, literature, the visual arts, arts education, cultural heritage, radio, soap opera production – demonstrated that culture can in fact play a vital role in overcoming stereotypes, establishing dialogues, helping to heal trauma, and developing new perspectives. The question is, therefore, how to better combine the efforts of all actors in the field in order to establish cultural activities as an integral part of foreign policy’s peace building efforts. A number of proposals were made at the roundtable, such as establishing a think tank, setting up a European Peace Institute, developing training curricula for foreign policy experts and an annual conference.

In order to better coordinate these different ideas and approaches, a working group on “Culture and Conflict” has been established as part of the ifa-funded programme Civil Conflict Resolution (zivik) with the aim of drafting a policy paper for EUNIC as a basis for negotiations along the budget lines of the European Commission. The group is open to interested people regardless of institutional background. It will be coordinated by Peter Mares (Contact: mares@ifa.de, +49 30 28 44 91 60), head of zivik, who will respond to all questions and inputs.

Agenda

1.30 pm Registration and Refreshments

2.00 pm **Welcome remarks** Ronald Grätz (Secretary General, ifa) and Ana-Paula Laborinho (President, EUNIC)

2.10 pm **Presentation:** Moukhtar Kocache (Ford Foundation, Middle East and North Africa)

Discussion 1: What impact do we have? Sharing experiences and best practice

Jemima Montagu (Co-Director, Culture + Conflict)

Gudrun Kramer (Director, Social and Cultural Funds Palestine, GIZ)

Susan Koscis (Director of Communications, Search for Common Ground)

Juliet Schofield (Project Manager Eurasia, International Alert)

Martina Fischer (Deputy Director, Berghof Conflict Research)

3.45 pm Coffee break and snacks

4.00 pm **Presentation:** Philippe Peyredieu du Charlat (DG DECVO)

Discussion 2: Building strategic partnerships for conflict resolution – Which way for European cultural institutes?

Franziska Brantner (MEP- Greens/EFA group and Member of the foreign affairs committee)

Luciano Rispoli (Director, EUNIC Global)

Amb. Martin Eichinger (Director General, Cultural Policy at Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs)

Damien Helly (Senior Research Fellow, European Union Institute for Security Studies)

Martin Hope (Director, British Council Brussels)

5.20 pm Next steps: 'Culture and Conflict' working group

Peter Mares (Head, zivik- Civil Conflict Resolution Funding Programme)

5.30 pm End

List of participants

Surname	Name	Organisation
Adam	Robert	Romanian Institute for Culture in Brussels
Anderson	Finn	Danish Institute for Culture
Aus dem Moore	Elke	ifa
Bergmann	Klaus	Deutsche Welle
Billows	William	ifa
Bondam	Klaus	Danish Institute for Culture
Borione	Delphine	French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
Brantner	Franziska	MEP Greens-EFA
Cremer	Marjolein	European Cultural Foundation
Cristescu	Roxana	Crisis Management Initiative
delPuerto y Gil	Gonzalo	Instituto Cervantes
DeVlieg	Mary Ann	IETM - Arts and Human Rights
Eichtinger	Martin	Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs
Faustino	Cristina	Instituto Camoes
Fischer	Martina	Berghof Conflict Research
Franke	Berthold	Goethe Institute
Gauthier	Jacob	International Crisis Group
Gawronska	Kamila	EUNIC Global
Gourrin	Myriam	French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs
Gouveia	Margarida	Instituto Camoes
Grätz	Ronald	ifa
Grassmann	Dorothea	ifa
Hale	Jaqueline	Open Society
Hanrath	Jan	Uni Duisburg Essen
Hardy	Mike	Institute for Community Cohesion
Heißenbüttel	Dietrich	Art Historian Journalist - ifa
Helly	Damien	European Union Institute for Security Studies
Hilhorst	Rosemary	British Council
Holzheid	Philipp	Kulturausschuss Bayern to EU
Hope	Martin	British Council
Horakh	Andrea	Deutsche Welle
Houlgatte	Laura	British Council

Kocache	Moukhtar	Ford Foundation
Koefler	Julia	British Council
Körber	Sebastian	ifa
Koscis	Susan	Search for Common Ground
Kramer	Gudrun	GIZ
Kühner	Martina	ifa
Laborinho	Ana Paula	EUNIC president
Lam	Stephane	Asphodèles theatre
Lebus	Frederike	EUNIC in Brussels
Lepp	Hans	Swedish Institute
Littmann	Pia	ifa
Mabilotte	Cecile	Alliance française
Mader	Katrin	ifa
Maenpaa	Katri	British Council
Mares	Peter	zivik
Martinelle	Marta	Open Society
Mattl	Ulla- Alexandra	EUNIC in Brussels
Meido Madiot	Jaqueline	Consultant culture/external relations
Meli	Sara	No peace without justice
Montague	Jemima	Culture + Conflict
Mundy	Simon	Kings College
Otcenas	Igor	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Slovak Institute
Ouchtati	Sana	More Europe
Peyredieu du Charlat	Philippe	DG DEVCO
Peyronnet	Cecile	Institute française
Podgorska	Beata	Polisch Institute
Pournaghi	Mani	Goethe Institute
Rispoli	Luciano	EUNIC Global
Roudil	Marie- Paule	UNESCO Representative to European Union
Saelens	Christian	Wallonie Bruxelles International
Schofield	Juliet	International Alert
Tardel	Jurca	Slovenian Institute
Vallely	Malachy	Louvain Institute for Ireland in Europe
Vielgrader	Mario	Kulturforum
Wagner	Gottfried	More Europe
Zupanec	Urška	Representation of the Republic of Slovenia to EU