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THE RE-EMERGING TRADITIONS-THE CULTURAL DIPLOMACY OF THE WEST

Introduction

'The goddess Athena, and her symbol, the olive tree, were the ultimate protectors of the ancient city of Athens, the strong rocky micro state on the edges of the Mediterranean Sea. The symbolic enemy of the goddess was Poseidon, the God of the sea, with its strong waves, that was bringing sea storms. This God was symbolizing the huge Mediterranean Sea, but also the Mediterranean region, strongly multicultural and interconnected, and once the only known global reality. The heroic fight was between the olive tree and the strong waves of the big Poseidon see.'

It seems that today, more than ever before, the olive trees³ of the contemporary nations and states are stoutly fighting, against the strong waves of the globalizing sea. Their unique cultural values and traditions are maybe old trees on the rock, but they are the only guarantee that nations won't be washed away by the new global cultural flood.

The new globalizing reality is constantly changing human knowledge, education, expressive culture and values. Thus, it threatens all forms of local and national cultures and identities, creating new cultural complexity and opening large space for cultural clashes around the world.

In reaction to these developments, many nations and states have decided to invest much in the preservation and development of their culture. They endeavor to present and propose their values, identity and aspirations, but in the same time to approach to the ideas, ideals and values of the others.

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³ Thomas Friedman, *'The Lexus and the Olive Tree'*, Farrar Straus Gioux, New York, 1999, 26-34

This mythological allusion is inspired by the theories of Thomas Friedman, who claims that most of the contemporary states today have built flexible models that constantly adjust 'between the forces of tradition and identity, represented by the olive tree and the drive 'for sustenance, improvement, prosperity and modernization' represented by the Lexus – the luxurious Japanese car.

Therefore, culture today represents an inevitable aspect of contemporary international relations, while cultural diplomacy has become one of the most respected tools in the contemporary diplomatic strategies.

The Cultural Diplomacy of the West

“If Western governments are to move beyond propaganda, they must meet four challenges: understanding the target audience, confronting hostility toward Western culture, engaging people emotionally, and proving their own relevance to the public concerned.”⁴

Mark Leonard,

Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations

The western societies are the ones that have invented the cultural diplomacy in its twentieth century form. This form of cultural diplomacy breathed with the spirit, values and understandings of these societies, and represented important aspect of the western influence and position in the twentieth century world.

Invented as part of the imperial strategies of United Kingdom and France and mastered by the United States in the Cold War, cultural diplomacy still represents one of the most superior assets in the foreign policy arsenal of the west.

Nonetheless, if the foreign policy strategies of the west aspire to remain relevant and effective, they have to anticipate the new realities. The renegotiation of the global relations of the western powers with the new-emerging ones, the fight with the anti-western global perceptions and attitudes, and the struggle with the new destructive ideologies feed by the global terrorism and crime, are the key challenges that all western strategies have to meet.

Therefore, this chapter gives particular attention the representative examples of the British, French and American cultural diplomacy. The aim of this study is not to expose all the capacities and greatness of these national cultural diplomacies concepts. In contrary, through examining the contemporary profile of these national realities, this chapter's analyses are focusing on the strategies and infrastructure in these countries that are prepared to face the actual and future global challenges.

⁴ Mark Leonard, “*Diplomacy by Other Means*”, in: *Foreign Policy* (132), 2002, pp. 48-56

2.1 Cultural diplomacy in the US

*“The image of our country (USA) is a montage of our foreign policy, the brands we market, and the entertainment we export. It could be referred to as a cocktail of ‘Rummy’ [Secretary Rumsfeld] and Coke, with Madonna on the side.”*⁵

Keith Reinhard, chairman, DDB Worldwide, and president, Business for Diplomatic Action⁶

This creative allusion brilliantly summarizes the contemporary image and some major national interests of the United States of America, as well as their foreign policy priorities. But most of all, it explains in the most simple words the wide and complex form of contemporary cultural diplomacy that the United States are practicing today.

This complex concept mainly articulated as “propagation of American culture and ideals around the world”,⁷ is managed through a vivid and maximally decentralized system that tends to integrate the interests, energy and capacities of the diverse and strongly developed layers of the American society.

Thus, American cultural diplomacy today is represented by the efforts of the different governmental departments and government-funded agencies, considerably balanced with the continuously escalating influence of many U.S. corporations and non-governmental organizations, and the numerous cultural messages that they are conveying to the world. Furthermore, it is evident that the strategies and actions of the American private-sector, functioning beyond the sphere of governmental policies, in various fields, like movies, music, or recording and broadcasting industry, are major transmitters of the U.S. images, symbols and ideas abroad, and have significant impact on the international attitudes towards the country.

⁵ *Cultural Diplomacy and The National Interest: In Search of a 21st-Century Perspective*, (The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, Washington, DC, 2002), p. 1

Originally published in Hearing on the 9/11 Commission Recommendations on Public Diplomacy: Defending Ideals and Defining the Message, Reinhard's testimony before the House Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, August 23, 2004.

⁶ *Cultural Diplomacy and The National Interest: In Search of a 21st-Century Perspective*, (The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, Washington, DC, 2002), p. 1

⁷ Ibid, Introduction

At the same time, the cultural products, as well as their marketing and branding, are involving interests of esteemed and highly profitable US industries, and as such they represent significant element of US foreign interest and they are integrated in all foreign policy strategies.

Furthermore, the high competitiveness of these products and brands, together with the capacities of US global corporations and media are perceived as an important aspect of the American leadership in the world.

This well-regarded tradition of “propagation of American culture and ideals around the world”⁸ has its roots in the American cultural diplomacy from the Cold War period. Becoming world super-power in this period, and leader of the North-Atlantic Alliance, U.S. had to master the cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy strategies, as important tools in the war over people’s “minds”.⁹

In the Cold War period the U.S. were investing much in the development of original strategies in cultural diplomacy, that were extensively exploited, and supported by large bureaucracy in Washington, and wide network all over the world.

Thus, institutions and initiatives like “America House”¹⁰ centers, American Corners, American studies, and libraries were exposing and sharing the American values abroad, and especially within the partner countries. At the same time, the critical forums of artist and intellectuals and the jazz and blues music transmitted through Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, brought hopes and dreams for many dissident leaders in the Eastern Bloc.¹¹

Additionally, and particularly successful, were the programs that provided cultural and educational exchanges. The different visits from and to U.S., of journalists, doctors, scientists, musicians, singers and performers, but also students, sportsmen and politicians, were rare and irreplaceable human and cultural links, aiming to present the vibrant and expressive life of the American democracy. These exchanges have created future leaders that were developing further the cooperation among the western democracies, and those that have embraced the change after the ‘Fall of the Berlin Wall’.

This foreign policy of U.S., that triumphed in the Cold War, and the important emphases in the cultural diplomacy field are still highly valued among many foreign policy professionals and strategists

⁸ Introduction to *Cultural Diplomacy and The National Interest: In Search of a 21st-Century Perspective*, (The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, Washington, DC, 2002)

⁹ Ibid, p. 7

¹⁰ *Cultural Diplomacy and The National Interest: In Search of a 21st-Century Perspective*, (The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, Washington, DC, 2002), p. 5

¹¹ Ibid, p. 1

and can be clearly illustrated with the Yale Richmond's words, in his book *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War*:

“Some fifty thousand Soviets visited the United States under various exchange programs between 1958 and 1988... They came, they saw, (and) they were conquered...”¹²

Nonetheless, after the end of the Cold War the U.S. cultural diplomacy has gone through some major shifts and reforms. The public policies and governmental funds in this field were dramatically reduced. This meant closing of many programs abroad, and discharging many professional staff and implementing agents with high excellence. The process finally led to closing of the United States Information Agency (USIA), the only public body, with capacity and mandate for central coordination of the public policies in the fields of public and cultural diplomacy.

The American cultural diplomacy in the decades after the Cold War has moved strongly towards the positions of free and globalised exchange of ideas and goods. The idea behind these reforms was based on the general notion in the Western societies, that the concepts of democracy and free-markets have become universal values and system of global interaction. In this circumstances, the developed and competitive business sector have taken the lead, followed by the civic sector that was strongly advocating for the American ideas and ideals around the world.

Nonetheless, while this new overenthusiastic concept has brought short-term economic results, and supported the interests of the U.S. companies and citizens, in the longer term it brought serious mistrust, and dramatic backlashes.

Unfortunately, in the dawn of the new millennium, The United States have faced aggressive opposition in the world and on their soil. The new hostile and extremely violent Muslim ideologies have challenged and even threatened not just the national interests of U.S., but rather all perceptions, beliefs and ideas of their citizens.

Furthermore, in the urge to unite the democratic world in order to answer to the global threat of terrorism, in the last decade, U.S. had to confront with the fact that, somewhere on the road of change, it had lost the enthusiasm of many of its allies. The strong anti-Americanism in public opinion of some European and South American states, together with the long-lasting mistrust of the less democratic

¹² *Cultural Diplomacy and The National Interest: In Search of a 21st-Century Perspective*, (The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, Washington, DC, 2002), p. 7

powers Russia and China, led to wide-spread opposition in the world. And at the same time it was a real wake up call for the U.S. government.

Many analysts have tried to trace this negative image to the aggressive attitudes of US products and businesses, and some unpopular and unilateral policies of US, as part of their mandate and responsibility for global leadership in the period after the Cold War. Nonetheless, there is no clear evidence that any of these factors led to the emergence of the new challenges.

But it is a fact that the human face of The United States has faded dramatically, and their decent cultural presence was almost erased from the personal and many times collective memory of many people around the world. The massive, too expressive, and commercially-oriented culture of the companies and aggressive lobbying of the civic groups have become a stereotype for whole U.S. society. The one-sided, lucrative, self-concerned and many times selfish motives of these and such organizations have seriously damaged the image of U.S. abroad and the credibility of U.S. global leadership.

This is why, the Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, of the U.S. Department of State, asks Americans to reveal again their soul,¹³ to restart the human two-sided communication among individuals and share with people across borders the ideas that they really “hold dear”¹⁴, values that are honest, personal and human, like: family, education or faith.

In the new American cultural diplomacy, the U.S. will have to reinvent the wheel. The state and public policies have to step in again, and moderate and cultivate the free-flow of American ideas and products, matching it with streams of human touch and mutuality. This is why, in the last years there is a modest increase in the number of cultural diplomacy professionals and funds for cultural programming, as well as search for former and actual good practices in the government-funded policies in this field. On every passing day, more American cultural diplomats are returning to the field, and together with the business and civic representatives, they seek to cultivate new contacts and promote the American values and culture¹⁵.

Finally, the ‘mighty America’, which once triumphed in the ‘war of ideas’, understood that it has to return to the table for debate in order to challenge the new aggressive cultural onslaughts and ideologies

¹³ Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, *Cultural Diplomacy The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy*, U.S. Dep. of State, 2005, p. 7

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 5

¹⁵ Ibid

of the enraged. In the same time, U.S. is challenged to ‘regain the love’ of all those who once believed in the Land of Freedom and ‘Who Loved America’¹⁶.

2.2 Cultural Diplomacy in UK

“The UK has lost its primacy in manufacturing, sport and politics, but is still among world leaders in terms of culture.”

Cultural Diplomacy, DEMOS – British think-tank¹⁷

Culture is perceived as one of strongest points of the British general reputation and leadership in the contemporary world. The changing realities, emergence of new powers and processes is challenging all layers of British society, urging new policy responses on national level and especially in foreign relations.

Nevertheless, cultural diplomacy, with deep roots in the British traditions remains, one of the most precious tools in the foreign policy of the United Kingdom (UK). The strong traditions in this field have built strong infrastructure and clear understanding for the strategic benefits of this model.

The frames of British cultural diplomacy are wide and the system is decentralized. The main institution in the field is the British Council, independent charity, established by the government in the year 1934. Nonetheless, the infrastructure spreads through different governmental departments starting with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and stretching as far as the UK Trade and Industry. Strong support and sovereign branch of this model are the esteemed, credible, independent and internationally known British cultural institutions. Some of these partner institutions are the British Library, British Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Royal Opera House¹⁸, and many others.

This cultural diplomacy network spreads also to smaller regional ‘memory’ and ‘performing’ institutions and amateur organization and programs. Additionally, UK remains world leading educational

¹⁶Ibid, p. 6

¹⁷ Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, J. Holden, Samuel Jones, *Cultural Diplomacy*, Demos, London, 2007, p. 18

¹⁸ Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, J. Holden, Samuel Jones, *Cultural Diplomacy*, Demos, London, 2007, p. 18

and training center in the field of culture.¹⁹ Thus, it attracts many young artists and scholars from around the world.

The main and overall goal of such significant investment of the whole British society in this field, is to maintain the “global cultural standing”²⁰ of the United Kingdom and “capitalize”²¹ additional political benefits from its unique traditions and competencies in this field.

However, the UK position as important cultural leader is under constant pressure from the competitive global reality, new approaches of other states, and especially the huge material and human resources of the emerging powers. This is why, the British government and society is making substantial efforts to constantly update the system of cultural diplomacy and its image in the world.

Thus, in 1990, the British government implemented large campaign for renewed national image and global presentation under the label ‘Cool Britannia’.²² The concept was emphasizing the innovative and creative nature of the British culture and society, using the music, art and fashion. Later on in 2006, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) undertook the goal to “make Britain the world’s creative hub”.²³

Yet, while many campaigns were undertaken, many institutions and artists involved and huge budgets spent on updating the contemporary British identity, it looks like Britain is not ready, nor willing, to give up on the ‘Olde Englishness’.²⁴ In the new globalizing reality the unique traditions of the country, once a mighty empire, remain as value, heritage and inspiration for the future.

Finally, while the British traditions and the famous decentralized model of cultural diplomacy represent pathway for many countries that are less experienced in this field, the UK system is constantly urging to make improvements. Thus, just in the last few years, we can see important developments, such as: the newly established Public Diplomacy Board, the strategy for the Performing arts published by “the UK Trade and Industry (UKTI)”, or the recently added and emphasized priority of “international”²⁵ cooperation of the Arts Council England (ACE).

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid. p. 13

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid, p. 26

²³ Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, J. Holden, Samuel Jones, *Cultural Diplomacy*, (Demos, London, 2007), p. 25

²⁴ Ibid, p. 79

²⁵ Ibid, p. 17

2.3 Cultural diplomacy of France

“France has a longstanding commitment to the promotion of French culture abroad, as a major element of its foreign policy.”²⁶

French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE)

Ministère des Affaires Étrangères

The French cultural diplomacy is the oldest and strongest in Europe. In the same time, this country remains the global leader in the practice of cultural diplomacy, and in investing and conducting of international cultural activities.

These diverse cultural diplomacy traditions involve activities like: exchanges of individuals, investment in infrastructure, social sciences, research and educational activities, and international archeological projects, but their real focus is French language and high culture.

France hasn't much reformed its cultural diplomacy model since its heydays in the ninetieth century. It remains a very centralized and strictly state-financed model. The biggest and maybe the only relevant support for the French cultural diplomacy comes from the government, with over ninety percents of the finances coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The French citizens are paying for extremely large global network that involves: 154 services for cultural activities in the embassies, 436 cultural institutes and language centers, Radio France Internationale (RFI), and many smaller and localized initiatives. For example, in Egypt alone, France supports a cultural institute with over 30 archaeological digs and its own scholarly press²⁷. This situation is possible because the French citizen pays four times more than any citizen in the world for cultural diplomacy.

The centralized model, strictly dependent on governmental policies in the field, is coordinated primarily through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) –Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, mostly

²⁶ Margaret J. Wyszomirski, Ph.D., Ch. Burgess, C.Peila, *International Cultural Relations: A multi-Country Comparison*, (Ohio State University, 2003), p. 5

²⁷ Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, J. Holden, Samuel Jones, *Cultural Diplomacy*, (Demos, London), p. 44

through its Department for Cultural Cooperation and the French Language (CCF), while the Ministry of Culture and Communications (MCC)²⁸ also provides some minor support to the overall concept.

This system is based on strong networks of professional state-financed agencies like l'Association Française d'Action Artistique (AFAA), that aim to promote French culture, the Alliance Française, another cultural agency focused primarily on the language, the French Cultural Centers and the cultural councilors in the French embassies.²⁹

France explicitly uses its high quality performances in culture and cultural diplomacy for strengthening relations with partners around the world. Among such large French cultural initiatives are the Saisons Culturels.³⁰ As part of this French tradition, each year is dedicated to one country, which is presented in France through series of exhibitions and events in different artistic fields. At the same time, French culture is also presented in the appropriate country. This is a brilliant cultural diplomacy strategy that creates meaningful and long-lasting relationships between different cultures and countries.

In France, 'La culture, c'est la politique' (Culture is politics).³¹ Although criticized as unreformed, and overly controlling of cultural institutions and non-governmental actors, the French conservative model is also commended for enabling coherent cultural collaboration that benefits the country's image and objectives.

Concluding remarks

*"Globalization will be a force for diversity and not uniformity."*³²

Bill Clinton, President of the United States

²⁸ Margaret J. Wyszomirski, Ph.D., Ch. Burgess, C.Peila, *International Cultural Relations: A multi-Country Comparison*, (Ohio State University, 2003), Appendix France, p. 2

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, J. Holden, Samuel Jones, *Cultural Diplomacy*, (Demos, London, 2007), p. 74

³¹ Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, J. Holden, Samuel Jones, *Cultural Diplomacy*, (Demos, London, 2007), p. 62

³² Speech of President Clinton, *The First White House Conference on Culture and Diplomacy*, (Washington DC, November 28, 2000), p. 4, available on http://www.state.gov/r/whconf/final_rpt.pdf, (accessed May 20, 2008).

The cultural globalization is rapidly pluralizing and reviving the contemporary international cultural dynamics. It imposes a new pace of cultural exchange, where nations continuously and actively urge to present and propose their values, identity and aspirations, but in the same time they are exposed to the ideas, ideals and values of the others.

In this increased interaction, nations and cultures enter into dialogues and debates, and inspire each other, but they also misunderstand and misinterpret each-others' messages and many times clash badly. This is why, culture and diplomacy have crucial role in these relations, their work and many times common efforts carry great responsibility for the future of all nations and people in the world. In this context, the role and importance of cultural diplomacy has dramatically increased, and it has become one of the most prominent strategies in contemporary foreign policies.

Cultural diplomacy is not a new concept. It has been used and mastered through history, and it played crucial role in diverse historical developments, especially in the diplomatic strategies of the western powers in the last two centuries. Yet, nowadays this diplomatic strategy is entering into new phase of its development. It has been rediscovered as solution to many contemporary global threats and challenged, and it is deployed by various modern diplomatic systems as crucial aspect of the efforts to strengthen the position of different states, nations and societies in the global relations. Today, although sometimes under other names, forms and extents its appearances can be traced in almost any diplomatic practice.

Thus, nowadays the cultural diplomacy is not an exclusive treasure and mystical tool of the western foreign policy strategies. It has rather transformed and gradually became an inevitable feature of international relations and irreplaceable and universal tool in the toolkit of contemporary diplomacy.

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