



United in Growing Diversity: How the EU Takes Intercultural Relations into Account in its Western Balkans Enlargement Policy

Diane Lafont De Sentenac (FR) – Prof. HELLY

Abstract

Since the release of its 2016 Strategy for International Cultural Relations, the European Union (EU) is renewing its engagement with its partners in the cultural policy field. In the framework of enlargement to the Western Balkans countries, these new set of policies could help the EU reinforcing and maintaining the credibility of its 'actorness' in the region, and ensure structural engagement with them. The EU partners' expectations regarding cultural cooperation raise the question of the degree to which the EU effectively considers intercultural differences in its external cultural action. This acknowledgement is highly relevant in a region where ethno-cultural diversity is such a defining threat. Through analysis of EU enlargement documents and communication as well as interviews with negotiators, this thesis addresses the role of cultural cooperation in the enlargement process. Drawing on secondary literature and public opinion polls to grasp the narratives developed around the EU's relations with the Western Balkans Six, it assesses to what extent EU cultural external action deals with the intercultural dimension and cultural differences in the enlargement policies.

Cultural cooperation allows the relationship between the EU and the region to move from mere crisis management to a pre-accession process. It paves the way for reciprocal commitments between the EU and the Western Balkans, following Jacques Delors' call to engage with the 'affective dimension of Europe's integration'. EU efforts to foster the Western Balkan countries' independent cultural sectors and to open its cultural programmes for their participation are concrete actions raising the profile of South-Eastern Europe – on the condition that the most diverse and independent cultural entrepreneurs can afford participation in EU cultural programmes, which is far from being the case in 'Creative Europe'. Besides, the mutual enrichment hoped for in intercultural relations is limited by the approximation requested in the enlargement process, positing the EU as a cultural regulator. Likewise, cultural diplomacy assimilating cultural cooperation to stability objectives and placing the Union as a 'cultural superpower' entails the risk of a securitisation of cultural relations, thus jeopardising their objectives of mutual understanding.