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Lessons Learned from the EL-CSID Project

Luk Van Langenhove and Richard Higgott

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1. Introduction

From March 2016 until February 2019, the European Commission funded a Horizon 2020 project on cultural, science and innovation diplomacy. This project – known as EL-SCID[1]- was coordinated by the VUB and brought together nine partners from Europe and beyond[2] to tackle the question of how the EU could enhance its external relations through the use of cultural diplomacy and science diplomacy and international cultural relations. It was the first time that the scientific community was invited by the European Commission to bring in a social sciences perspective to the issues of science and cultural diplomacy (CSD). The project generated a wealth of studies and reports, which have been summarized in a final report[3] and can all be consulted online.

This note presents some additional reflections by the two lead scientists of EL-CSID about what is going on in Europe in science and cultural diplomacy. The focus is on what we learned in those three years of being emerged in studying CSD, and on what we think are now needed, possible and feasible courses of action for the respective Brussels policy communities. This resulted in a wide range of both generic and specific recommendations. The core ones of which are identified here and translated into advice for consideration for the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Needless to say, these are the authors' options and assessments and may not necessarily be shared by the rest of the EL-CSID community.

2. The Key Messages from the EL-CSID Project

EL-CSID has run as a research project for three years. In that time, it has generated (i) a substantial corpus of high-quality research (documented in the Annexes to the Final Report) and (ii) a series of what we judge to be significant findings, of both a generic and a specific nature, concerning EU international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy on the one hand and science and innovation diplomacy on the other. We will not restate here, but one of our general key findings is that the question of European leadership in the field of CSD can be considered in the following ways:

(i) The EU indeed has a potential to develop a **capacity** in these areas.

(ii) But, for that capacity to develop, it requires an **acceptance** amongst Member States and the additional need to carve out a collective niche at the EU level that complements the actions currently undertaken at national levels.

(iii) But for this to happen there needs to be a greater **willingness on the part of both the member states and** the Brussels institutions to do so. This willingness seems to be present to a greater or lesser extent in some quarters of the cultural relations policy and science policy communities in Brussels. Some first steps have already been taken in the design of a "strategic approach" to international cultural relations. Less progress has been made to date in the field of science. Innovation in cultural and science diplomacy must be led by Brussels but will only flourish if it accords a greater role in this process of leadership to the scientific and cultural communities it purports to represent.

This leaves us with several and yet unanswered questions regarding the future of CSD in Europe that deserve consideration: what capacities need to be developed at EU level? How to do this successfully requires a deft and nuanced approach to policy development in Brussels that brings the Member States along with it free of the conceptual and definitional ambiguity that currently infects both cultural and science diplomacy.

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[1] The acronym EL-CSID stands for 'European Leadership in Science, Cultural and Innovations' and was funded with under grant agreement No 693799.
[2] The consortium consisted out of 9 partners located in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Slovenia, the UK and Singapore.
[3] For an overview of the output and deliverables of the project see www.el-csid.eu. The final report can be consulted at https://www.el-csid.eu/final-conference.

What strategy should the EU follow? Developing an answer to this question cannot be done merely by strengthening the scientific base of CSD alone. Rather we think that (i) the conceptual basis of both cultural and science diplomacy has to be refined, and (ii) that the empirical study of CSD needs not only to be further developed but also be reframed. Only by clearing conceptual ambiguities and strengthening the research base on CSD, will it be possible to develop policies and practices that allow CSD to be effective and delivering on its purpose. In order to realize that, we think it will be necessary for the different groups of stakeholders involved to take actions in the domains of international cultural and science relations.

3. The Concepts of Science and Cultural Diplomacy Revisited

When looking at the term science diplomacy (SD), one might think of the bon mot that Hermann Ebbinghaus once used to describe the emerging discipline of psychology which "has a long past, yet its real history is short" (Ebbinghaus, 1908, p. 3). That same statement seems to perfectly fit the field of SD. The long past is illustrated by many examples where scientists and artists have been at the forefront of international collaboration. Already in 1723, the UK Royal Society instituted the post of Foreign Secretary. And today scientists all over the world are connected to each other through "invisible colleges", which are networks organized around scientific disciplines or problems. As such, the scientific community has always been an international actor independently of the concerns of states. The same holds for the cultural sector albeit structured slightly differently. For understandable reasons, given the differing nature of their subject material, the main cultural bodies and cultural industries are not as joined up internationally as many science communities; although there are major bodies such as the European Union National Institutes of Culture (EUNIC) and the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture (IFACCA) that act trans-nationally. But like the science community they zealously protect what they see as their scientific and intellectual autonomy—artistic freedom, especially in art, music and theatre. This is of course in a manner comparable to scientific research funding.

Certain historical cases have been classified retrospectively as examples of CSD. Think of the joint space explorations conducted by the United States and the USSR in the 1960s and 1970s, or the story of Van Cliburn, the American pianist who went in 1958 to Moscow and won the first International Tchaikovsky concours. But it is important to realize that at that time, the concepts of science or cultural diplomacy were not used to point to those practices. The notions of CSD have only became present in policy documents and scholarly writings in recent years, fueled by the introduction of the (extremely elastic) concept of 'soft power' by Joe Nye in 1990 – the idea that states can exert power through cultural assets, including their science systems (see Nye, 1994). However, as we identify in some detail in our Report, it is only in the first and second decades of the twenty-first century that CSD has become a fashionable ingredient in many policy documents emanating from science academies, cultural organizations and national governments and Brussels institutions alike.

3.1 Coping with varieties of science diplomacy

It is not exactly clear when the concept of Science Diplomacy was coined and first used, but today it is becoming widely used by both policy-makers, scientists and scholars of International Relations. In 2010 the U.K. Royal Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) published a landmark report in which they distinguish between three forms of Science Diplomacy: diplomacy for science, science in diplomacy and science for diplomacy.

Science Diplomacy is thus a container concept or "hosting metaphor" that brings very different issues under one denominator. As a result, the proliferation of Science Diplomacy initiatives is hampered by an ambiguity in how the concept is used and about what counts as Science Diplomacy practices and actors. This needs to be settled.

The EI-CSID project has identified a number of practices of Science Diplomacy that are very diverse:

a. Soft power actions to attract scientist and to promote a country;
b. Exchange programmes to stimulate scientific cooperation;
c. Science advisors in Foreign Affairs departments;
d. Science diplomats in embassies or in diplomatic missions;
e. Scientific contacts in the context of conflict resolution.

This diverse set of practices reflects the vague and multi-faceted nature of Science Diplomacy. It brings with it a number of problems. The first major problem is that the polysemous nature of the concept of Science Diplomacy (which goes back to triple definition proposed by the AAAS/Royal Society 2010 report) has resulted in very different national and European understandings of and approaches to science diplomacy. This in turn makes it difficult to develop a coherent strategy and to make the concept accepted by scientists. Indeed, while the concept of science diplomacy might have gained some currency amongst the European science policy making community, it is still either unknown or received with some skepticism by the wider scientific community (Proud, 2018).

Another major problem is that scientists might tend to be skeptical of governments that may want to 'use' them in pursuing a strict agenda. Conversely, foreign governments may react in an equally wary and reluctant manner when cooperation in science is suddenly framed as a foreign policy, or diplomatic, initiative. On the other side of the spectrum, most governments lack a clear strategy regarding science diplomacy. For some, it seems to function as a mere catchword used to label their policy of nation-branding and self-promotion. Science diplomacy is often flawed in implementation and hindered by political dynamics. Currently, supporters and investigators of science diplomacy are mainly located within policy communities. As such, the primary drivers of science diplomacy are policy makers in states or intergovernmental organizations, calling into question the extent to which scientists are actually involved and actively promote policy agendas.

Furthermore, in most cases the development of a science diplomacy policy is usually undertaken with little input from, or coordination, with the relevant departments national departments of foreign affairs, international trade or development aid. In a surprising contrast to the strategy developed by the High Representative HE Federica Mogherini and the EEAS in the domain of cultural diplomacy the EU has yet to develop and deploy a coherent strategy for science diplomacy.

3.2 Distinguishing between cultural diplomacy and cultural international relations

International Cultural relations and cultural diplomacy suffers from similar definitional ambiguities as science diplomacy. This in no small part originates in the contested nature and myriad uses of the concept of culture. Culture is intrinsic to many areas of international relations. No simple definition proves acceptable to interested scholars and practitioners. Awareness and sensitivity in both institutional and interpersonal dealings, including the inevitable exchange of cultural norms and ideas are, to a greater or lesser degree, important to the success of soft power initiatives across the policy spectrum such as health, education, science. It may also be argued in the reverse, that in the protocols and practices of non-culture specific initiatives, cultural norms and values are implicitly communicated.

While EL-CSID researchers acknowledged the transverse nature of culture, the research focussed on activities and initiatives to gain or exert influence, with culture as its primary focus and through cultural practices. Culture was seen as a flexible and open-ended concept not limited simply to the arts and cultural industries. EU programmes and policies that define a broad idea of culture and its use in external relations go well beyond the concept of cultural diplomacy as a state driven tool for merely showcasing values and practices of national prestige. Education is often included in the identification of the cultural domain. Indeed, in the *Preparatory Action Report* (EU, 2014) the role of higher education providers in enhancing the cultural attraction of the EU was explicitly recognised. However, education was not referred to in any significant manner in the subsequent *Joint Communication; Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations* (EC, 2016).

The *Joint Communication* and the principal actors in the Brussels policy community (from the EEAS to EUNIC) favour the use of international cultural relations to cultural diplomacy. We in our research, and in our ultimate deliberations, felt that while there are differences of degree and kind between cultural relations and cultural diplomacy, they are not two discrete types of activity and that the relationship between them is best seen as a spectrum with the transition from one to the other being fungible along that spectrum rather than tightly defined. The key issues in the position the ICR and CD along the spectrum are twofold: they are (i) influence and (ii) funding. International cultural relations can have positive (and indeed negative) effects on the enhancement of either a state and/or the EU's standing in international relations. The key issue is the identification of the principal drivers of ICR. Clearly in its endeavours to develop a strategic approach to ICR the Commission and the EEAS are not engaged simply in support of art for arts' sake. The whole purpose of the strategic approach and indeed its inclusion in the *Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy* (EU, 2016a) is to see it as a

vehicle contributing to the enhancement of the EU's international relations. Not to see it as a form of (public) diplomacy we consider disingenuous. ICR becomes unambiguously cultural diplomacy, we would argue, when the activity is in receipt of government funding. At this time there is little formally designated funding specifically for ICR although there are plans for a specific funding envelope to be launched in the middle of 2019.

4. Towards a New Start for Cultural and Science Diplomacy

What we learned from being engaged more than three years now in studying CSD is that as both an emerging scholarly field of study and applied area of public policy, CSD needs to be scrutinized and the current usages of the concepts are not to be taken at face-value. We propose three ways to strengthen the scientific base of CSD:

4.1 Consider the concepts of CSD as discursive tools

Rather than looking for a precise definition one should look to the concept as a mental and discursive tool to refer to networks of people that engage in practices that have both a scientific and a diplomatic component. Such a conceptual tool can either be used by such actors in describing and accounting for what they are doing, or it can be used by other actors to describe what they think some actors are doing. Consequently, there exists a realm of activities that can be qualified as Science Diplomacy without that the actors involved should therefore refer to their activities as Science Diplomacy, let alone to themselves as "diplomats".

The first step is therefore to clearly distinguish between the different discursive occasions where the concept is used.

First of all, Science or Cultural Diplomacy can refer to a profession as there exists groups of people that make a living out of it and present themselves as either Science diplomats or Cultural Diplomats. Amongst them are for sure the Science Advisors within the departments of Foreign Affairs as well as the so-called scientific or cultural attaché's that work at embassies. But states do not have the monopoly of SCD professions. Scientists can also engage in professional Science Diplomacy activities, such as taking up positions in for instance the ICCP. In such instances they do not to perform research but engage in translating scientific results in language that fits the realm of diplomacy.

Next, references to CSD are to be regarded as an accountability tool used by policy-makers to carve out a domain where they can allocate resources for achieving certain strategic goals. Science Diplomacy can also be used as a tool in accounting *a posteriori* for actions undertaken by scientists such as building of maintaining relations with colleagues of countries where normal diplomatic relations are not possible. In that case science Diplomacy refers to scientists by performing their 'normal' science activities and collaborating are creating effects that have diplomatic consequences.

4.2 Pay attention to the difference between explicit and implicit CSD

A second step is to approach the concept from a perspective that allows to distinguish between two contexts when the concept is used by actors to refer to certain policies or actions that involve the engagement of scientific or cultural communities in transnational interactions. SCD therefore involves two strands:

i. The foreign affairs policies that refer to culture or science
ii. The scientific and cultural practices that are of a transnational nature.

In both cases those policies or activities can or cannot be labelled as CSD by the actors themselves. When explicitly labelled by the actors as diplomacy policy or diplomatic practices we can refer to them as **explicit CSD.** When not labelled as such, we can refer to them as **implicit CSD**. The implicit and explicit policies involve three aspects that need to be considered:

i. The **willingness** of the actors to use culture and science for diplomacy goals. This involves mapping the ambitions of the actors and an analysis of how CSD policy interacts with other Foreign Affair policies and strategies.
ii. The **capacity** of the actors to mobilize science for diplomacy goals. This involves mapping the available resources and instruments.
iii. The **acceptance** of CSD policies by other actors, including the scientific and cultural communities.

4.3 Adopt a more precise meaning of the concepts of CSD

As for Science diplomacy, a third step would be to drop the AAAS typological definition of Science Diplomacy as a lot of practices and discourses simply do not fit in that canvas (see Terekan, Gluckman… 2018). The El-CSID project has proposed several alternative framings. In Van Langenhove (2016) it was proposed to focus upon the global dimension of Science Diplomacy. Van Langenhove (tools report) also introduced three possible areas to focus upon that are a mix of self-interests and aspirations to have a positive impact on the world.

These areas are: (i) Science and Technology contributions towards enhancing regional security in a country's neighborhood, (ii) Science and technology contributions towards improving trade in the world, and (iii) Science and Technology contributions towards tackling global problems. This has been echoed by Terekan, gluckman (2018) when they proposed to think of Science Diplomacy in the following terms:

- Actions designed to directly advance a country's national needs
- Actions designed to address cross-border interests
- Actions primarily designed to meet global needs and challenges

With regards to international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy it is made clear in the documentary trail that has emerged from the time of the *Joint Communication* (2016) through the *Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy* (EU, 2016a) to the Memorandum of Agreement signed between the EEAS and EUNIC (May, 2017) that international cultural relations is the preferred term and that a form of light touch "governance without government" is required. This has moved from the Friends of the Presidency Group to the Cultural Affairs Committee of the European Parliament (2018). That ICR is meant to be a vehicle for the enhancement of the EU's international standing, where not explicit, is implicit throughout

5. General recommendations

EL-CSID has messages and recommendations towards four communities:

a. To the scholars that study SCD

i. More theory is needed that links SCD to our wider understanding of the theory and practice of international relations at this turning point in the future of the contemporary global order
ii. More case studies needed about successes and failures of SCD

b. To the practioners of SCD policy

i. More exchange of best practices needed with other practioners
ii. More communication needed with policy makers and scientists

c. To the scientific and cultural communities

i. Be open for the International Relations and Foreign Affairs consequences of your scientific or cultural work; especially in the contemporary international environment replete with nationalist and populist challenges to both international cultural relations and scientific theory and practice and indeed rationalist based knowledge practices in general.
ii. Try to engage in networks that can have SCD consequences

d. To the policymakers responsible for CSD policy

i. Integrate SCD in other relevant policies
ii. Monitor what is going on

Each of the above recommendations can be further detailed and targeted at more specific audiences.

6. Recommendations with regard to the EU's SCD

6.1. European Science Diplomacy

The EU, one of the largest funding authorities for scientific endeavors in the world, has also embraced this concept through its policy declarations in the 2016 "Open Innovation, Open Science and Open to the World" strategy. The EU has in recent years advanced the concept of science diplomacy as part of its RTD policy. At the same time, several EU Member States have also put Science Diplomacy on their national science policy agenda. The EU should leave Science Diplomacy to its Member States, who can each decide on their own priorities. But it should also complement national endeavours by two EU actions:

- Set up a support function for MS and EU that monitors and stimulates Science Diplomacy

As a first step, a '***preparatory action'*** such as the one implemented for the EU's cultural diplomacy, should be launched for science diplomacy. Part of this preparatory action could be the creation of an EU platform or **observatory for Science Diplomacy** that serves as a knowledge sharing platform.

- Develop its own Science Diplomacy strategy on what the EU could do to take a leadership role in mobilising science for the purposes of enhancing the EU's external relations.

The prime objective for developing a **EU Science Diplomacy strategy** should also be that it becomes full-fledged part of the wider EU strategy for external actions. Today, Science Diplomacy is mentioned as one of the policy domains of the EEAS, but it is not central to its strategy. Moreover, the efforts of DG Research in Science Diplomacy are not well integrated with the EEAS strategy.

The **EU Science Diplomacy strategy** should also aim to further integrate science diplomacy in its open science agenda and set some clear **priorities** need to be set in line with what the EU wants to achieve as a regional and global actor. Given the current geopolitical situation and the enduring global problems the world is facing, a possible strategy for an EU science diplomacy could be a triple focus:

i. EU science diplomacy as tool for building European identity.
ii. EU science diplomacy as a tool for increasing regional security in the EU's neighbourhood.
iii. EU science diplomacy as a tool for realizing the sustainable development goals.

This can be translated in concrete actions, such as:

⇒ Reinforcing for the use of S&T cooperation as an instrument for internal cohesion.

⇒ Strategically deploying of S&T cooperation as an instrument in the enhancement of neighbourhood policy of the EU

⇒ Promoting and supporting an open S&T worldwide by freeing access of public funded results and by promoting the value of free speech for scientists

⇒ Enhancing the EU's ability to be a leader in mobilizing science for the SDG agenda of the United Nations.

6.2 European cultural Diplomacy

Activity to enhance the utility of international cultural relations and cultural diplomacy in the European Union's international relations should be tempered by two cautionary judgments and three forward looking recommendations:

- *Caution 1:* The Brussels policy community should eschew any attempt to identify and project a common narrative built on an assumption of shared European cultural values. While there indeed may be shared values, packaging them for export as part of the EU's external relations is fraught with dangers of misperception. At the least it could be interpreted by Europe's external partners on the receiving end of the EU's ICR as arrogance, at worst it could be perceived as neo-colonialism or Europe behaving as a " cultural superpower" as HE Federica Mogherini has occasionally been known to assert.
- *Caution 2:* Accept that ICR and CD are two ends of a policy spectrum not two discrete domains of activity
- *Recommendation 1:* The policy community at the core of European ICR and CD should be engaged in a perpetual mapping and re-mapping of the evolving nature of ICR and CD. Given the importance of digital communication and social media in ICR, this should be done via the use of new and innovative digital tools available for re-mapping.
- *Recommendation 2:* Institutionalise the substantive importance of ICR and CD in their own right rather than see them simply as second tier instruments of an illdefined notion of soft power.
- *Recommendation 3:* Most difficulty, while accepting the principle of member state sovereignty in cultural diplomacy, member states should revisit the issue of core competence to deliver a greater ability for Brussels to provide a stronger coordinating role. If cultural diplomacy is to be a core element of the EU's *Global Strategy* (2016) then consideration should be given to giving the EEAS the competence and material support to play a joined-up role.

7. Conclusions

Science and cultural diplomacy are emblematic examples of a wider movement; the purview of diplomatic practice has expanded beyond politics, now encompassing diverse arenas from economics to environmental regulation. Though SCD possesses weaknesses as well as strengths, it is increasingly regarded as an important policy tool by governments and is the subject of a growing research literature.

Already in 1796, the President of the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks wrote in a letter to his French colleague Jacques Julien Houtou de Labillardière, that "the science of two nations may be at peace while their politics are at war" (…) and surely nothing is so likely to abate the Rancour that Politicians frequently entertain against each other as to see Harmony and good will prevail among Brethren who cultivate science". More recently, UN Secretary General António Guterres said in a communication to Friends of Europe: "*Perhaps the most precious – and increasingly scarce – resource in our world today is dialogue"*. Contributing to make that dialogue possible is perhaps the biggest challenge for the practitioners of science and cultural diplomacy. And is the area where the EU can indeed show leadership to the world.

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About the authors

Luk Van Langenhove is Academic Commissioner for International institutes and Networks at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and scientific coordinator of the H2020 project EL-CSID. Between December 2017 and January 2019, he served as Academic Director a.i. at the Institute for European Studies (IES) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). He previously held the position of Director at the United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) in Bruges and Representative of the Rector at UNESCO in Paris. Before, he was Deputy Secretary-General of the Belgian Federal Ministry of Science Policy, Deputy Chief of Cabinet of the Belgian Federal Minister of Science Policy and a researcher and lecturer at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). From 2006 until 2010 he was Vice-President of the International Social Sciences Council. He currently also teaches at the VUB (course: the psychology of communication) and has been teaching as guest professor at the College of Europe, the University of Maastricht and Université Libre de Bruxelles.
Since 2018 he is a honorary professorial fellow at Warwick University.

Richard Higgott is Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Vesalius College and Emeritus Professor of International Political Economy at the University of Warwick. He held early career junior appointments at several universities including the University of Western Australia and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard followed by appointments as Professor (International Politics and Public Policy) at the Australian National University and Director of its Graduate Training Programme for the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Professor of Government at the University of Manchester before moving to Warwick where he founded and directed the Centre for Globalisation and Regionalisation. Between 2006 and 2014 he held senior administrative appointments as Pro Vice Chancellor (Research) at Warwick and Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University in Australia.

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Institute for European Studies (IES)
www.el-csid.eu

Institute for European Studies
Pleinlaan 5
B-1050 Brussel
T: +32 2 614 80 01
E: ies@vub.ac.be
www.ies.be

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