EU's civil society bias in the Neighbourhood: a case study on culture

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to analyse the European Union's (EU) financial and technical support to cultural actors in EU Neighbourhood countries. In particular, it enquires *whether the boundaries of what cultural sector means for the EU are based on a Eurocentric understanding of civil society or rather on a more inclusive definition mediated with partner countries' societies.* The work hypothesises that the EU tends to support cultural civil society organisations on the basis of their closeness to European standards, norms and values. Findings highlight a mixed picture. On the one hand, a Eurocentric understanding of civil society tends to prevail in EU discourses and is enforced by technical means addressing the *status and capacity* of the organisations involved, with some exceptions. On the other hand, the EU does not seem to impose strong prerequisites concerning the *agenda* of organisations and aims to be as inclusive as possible.

Keywords:

EU international cultural relations

Cultural diplomacy

European Neighbourhood policy

Civil society

Culture

Introduction

In many neighbourhood countries ethnic, religious and cultural identities and traditions play a crucial role as regards the way society functions. During the public consultation, stakeholders referred to these factors and asked the EU to allow more co-ownership. The EU should therefore expand outreach to relevant members of civil society in its broadest sense as well as social partners (EC & HR, 2015: 7).

This reflection included in the 2015 Joint Communication on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) represents a rare and ambiguous reference to an issue that does not lie at the heart of policy debates in Brussels. This can be summarised by three questions. What constitutes 'civil society' (CS) in countries that do not share many of the fundamental political, social and cultural features of liberal Western societies? Does the European Union (EU) engage with societal actors that do not resemble its own idea of CS as either independent from political and religious ties or showing a clear liberal and democratic agenda? If not, does the EU have an interest in engaging with such actors? While an encompassing reflection on all these aspects is beyond the reach of this work, the following analysis seeks to provide a case study with a thematic focus. It looks at EU cultural relations with Neighbourhood countries and in particular at EU's financial and technical support to their cultural actors. Cultural relations have been an integral part of the ENP since its beginning, and the EU has developed a sound experience in supporting the cultural sector in the region. However, this study seeks to enquire whether the boundaries of what cultural sector means for the EU are mostly based on a Eurocentric understanding of CS or rather on a more inclusive definition mediated with the nature of societies in partner countries.

The concept of civil society is a contested one, subject to multiple definitions and often politicised. It is widely understood as a space between the individual and the state, where association and civic action take place to represent societal needs. As observed by Yom (2005) different scholars and actors stretch the definition of what is civil society and who is part of it based on their normative views. For example, seen with a western blueprint of CS in mind, the Arab world has in recent decades failed to develop a large number of secular associations successfully advocating for political and societal change. The public space of civic activism, solidarity and political transformation has been more often occupied by Islamist associations, which have remained largely outside of the Western donors support to CS (ibid.: 20). Structural differences in the expressions of activism in the public sphere also exist between Western Europe and the post-Soviet space, where totalitarian rule and repression have affected the development of CS and participation in its organisational life (Bernhard & Karakoç, 2007). The purpose of this research is not primarily to analyse these differences, but to inquire if a Eurocentric definition of the boundaries of CS informs policies in support of the cultural sector. The work starts from a hypothesis that the EU tends to approach and support Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the field of culture on the basis of their closeness to European standards, norms and values. If we consider foreign policy as a process that traces boundaries (Campbell, 1998: 73), it becomes clear that this practice of selection and exclusion is not neutral, as it concerns the definition of a European identity in relation with (and potentially in opposition to) Others.

Methodology

In order to justify the hypothesis, the analysis starts by reviewing the broader academic debates over the role of international donors in supporting CS in developing countries. The major criticality arising from this review is the following: Western donors tend to adopt an exclusionary approach to CS in developing countries and target actors on the ground of their *status* (privileging formal/registered organisations), *agenda* (privileging organisations sharing liberal norms and values), and *capacity* (privileging organisations with pre-existing experience in aid techniques and vocabulary). Taken together, these factors can create or further exacerbate societal cleavages and lead to the creation of an artificial CS which, while suiting some Western donors' needs and ambitions, is not endogenous and legitimised.

After this framing, the hypothesis is tested against three types of empirical evidence. First, document analysis of the declaratory level of EU policies to enquire how the EU perceives and defines the boundaries of CS in ENP countries. Second, an analysis of some of the instruments designed by the EU to support the cultural sector in the Neighbourhood to see whether these concerns are reflected in practice. This will focus on recent multi-country and regional programmes: cross-border cooperation (CBC) programmes for the

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period 2014-2018 in the East and 'Media and culture for development in the Southern Mediterranean region' (hereafter MaC) (2013-2017) in the South. Finally, a further case study will look at the selection of local beneficiaries under a project managing sub-granting for MaC.

The analysis of the selected EU programmes will be based on the operationalisation of the key issues identified in the literature review into the three indicators of *status, agenda*, and *capacity*. Indicators are then further disaggregated into a total of five sub-indicators: *status, support to organisations pursuing religious and political goals, proximity to EU values, previous experience on EU or international grants, and use of language.*

First, EU programmes will be analysed with regard to the *status* (1) of the organisations they support. If EU programmes only fund officially registered organisations, this can greatly limit the representativeness of CS in countries where informal groups are central or where governments use registration to control and repress independent actors. Also, whether applicants can be for profit or non-profit, governmental or non-governmental organisations expands or restricts the reach of EU activities.

Second, the analysis looks at the agenda of supported actors and identifies two sub-indicators that may define the boundaries of what CS does the EU support in the field of culture: explicit exclusion of organisations pursuing *religious and political goals* (2a) or support based on *proximity to EU values* (2b) on issues like gender, environment, minority or other horizontal issues.

Third, the article enquires on the expected capacity of the organisations applying for EU funding and identifies two sub-indicators. Targeting organisations without previous *experience on EU or international grants* (3a) can contribute to create a path dependency and target an artificial CS isolated to the real local needs. Also, the use of *language* (3b) will be taken into account by checking whether EU programmes give access to actors who only speak local

languages and do not master European languages like English or French. The research will rely on existing literature, official documents and websites from the EU and other organisations, as well as semi-structured interviews to managers of EU cultural programmes and projects.

International donors and support to civil society in developing countries: a literature review

Beginning in the late 1980s, the concept of CS stirred political aspirations in the international arena. As the Cold War was coming to an end with its winners and losers, CS raised in importance as a prerequisite to universalise Western liberal democracy as "the final form of human government" (Fukuyama, 1989: 4). Inspired by Eastern Europe's democracy movements of the 1980s, Western aid institutions added political objectives to their agendas, based on the idea that vibrant CS forces would play an active role in undermining authoritarian regimes and contributing to democratic consolidation. As such, the very expression 'civil society' has evoked prospects of change and liberation: in Diamond's view, for instance, it is "a vital instrument for containing the power of democratic governments, checking their potential abuses and violations of the law, and subjecting them to public scrutiny" (Diamond, 1994: 7). Against this background, in recent years a growing body of literature has nuanced celebratory assessments of CS and proposed a more careful look at the role and influence of international donors in developing countries.

As a first critical point, researchers have called into question conceptualisations of CS as the operational sphere of legally recognised organisations, as these provide only partial accounts of collective action in developing countries (Salamon & Anheier, 1997; Chazan, 1992; De Weijer & Kilnes, 2012; Benessaieh, 2011; Lorch, 2016; Malena & Finn Heinrich, 2007; Kelley, 2011). In other words, defining CS actors' on the basis of their legal status could already entail a process of

inclusion or exclusion. For instance, Banks and Hulme criticise the "simplistic view of CS as a collection of organisations rather than a space for interaction and negotiation around power" (2012: 21). Also, Malena and Finn Heinrich (2007) note that such an approach focuses largely on Western contexts, in which formal or registered organisations are prevalent. Thus, it neglects those areas where most CSOs are informal or not registered. Similarly, De Weijer and Kilnes observe that the inclusion of non-recognised groups is crucial in fragile states, as "civil society tends to be much less organised and formalised than in other low-income or middle-income countries" (2012: 2). In addition, in some cases legal registration is a necessary but not sufficient condition to be an aid recipient: scholars have found that many international donors equate CS with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and provide resources to support their sector, to the detriment of actors with a higher potential of social change, such as grassroots or social movements (Belloni, 2001; Seckinelgin, 2002; Banks & Hulme, 2012; De Weijer & Kilnes, 2012). Banks and Hulme point out that although NGOs are part of CS, "they are far from synonymous with CS, and do not automatically strengthen CS" (2012: 21).

Furthermore, literature has emphasised that donors' exclusionary approach is not only 'law-driven', following the focus on the organisational status, but also 'value-driven', as donors tend to predominantly target those forces sharing a Western agenda and also exclude actors with explicit political or religious goals (Tvedt, 1998, 2002; Clark, Friedman & Hochstetler, 1998; Mercer, 2002; Clarke, 2006). In a case study on NGOs and international donors in Mexico, Benessaieh observes that, under donors' influence, global CS tend to speak Northern tongues, showing "a discursive predominance of the norms and values of Western-liberal societies" (2011: 74). As a result, local organisations tend either to conform to the objectives of the donors and downplay their own agendas, or translate "both for donors and for communities in order to match the latter's perceived needs with the former's preferred language" (2011: 77). Similarly, Tvedt (1998, 2002) notes that NGOs from developing countries have shown a worrying phenomenon of "institutional isomorphism" (2002: 370) in a short period of time. The aid industry thus operates as "a transmission belt of a dominant discourse tied to Western notions of development" (Ibid). However, isomorphism does not really apply to political or religious organisations: Clarke notes that donors face the challenge "of broadening

their conception of civil society, of embracing its more politically contentious and culturally exotic aspects so that it becomes more socially inclusive" (2006: 846).

Together with status and agenda, literature identifies capacity as another powerful indicator highlighting processes of inclusion or exclusion. Kelley (2011) observes that the techniques used by local NGOs hardly come from the grassroots of developing countries, as these organisations are often under the control of educated and western oriented individuals who, in spite of their weak CS connections, have higher capacity in managing international funding. Overall, professionalization appears as a key feature of the CS sector, which in turn raises questions about its legitimacy and capacity to promote long-term change. Similar concerns are voiced on ENP Southern neighbourhood: Cebeci and Schumacher raise the issue of co-optation of CSOs, which are often professionalised, supported by local elites and "detached from their own populations, having little or no understanding of their local needs" (2017: 19). Together with previous experience in aid management, language barriers may also exclude grassroots organisations from applying. In a study assessing EU assistance to CS in the South Caucasus, Aliyev (2016) observes that lack of fluency in the English language can challenge grassroots organisations' capacity to participate in European calls, as they are short of trained personnel or funds to request translation services.

Contrary to those insisting that CS is by no means progressive and pursuing the public good (Diamond, 1994 & 1997; Knight & Hartnell, 2001), some scholars have warned against exclusionary approaches. For instance, De Weijer and Kilnes (2012) stress that this may undermine participation, especially if they have a broad support in the public opinion and can bring social change. To Aliyev (2016), a major limit of EU support for CS in the South Caucasus lies in a substantial lack of representation of the civil actors the EU engages with.

While critical literature on international donors' support to CS is extensive, EU's actorness as a donor in developing countries, and particularly in ENP countries, has been so far largely neglected. Where possible, this section has attempted to include academic contributions on the subject (Belloni, 2001; Fischer, 2011; Aliyev, 2016; Schumacher, 2016; Cebeci & Schumacher, 2017). In this regard, by assessing EU cultural discourse in the ENP, the next sections of this article attempt to fill a void in the literature and contribute to the broader debate over CS support.

Tracing the boundaries of "civil society" in the ENP

Culture and cultural differences have a role in political and security discourses, dominating much of recent EU relations with the neighbourhood. ENP societies and cultures are often identified as 'fragile' and unprepared to absorb EU values (Cebeci & Schumacher, 2017: 15-16). Some issues like terrorism and oppression of women can be presented as problems inherently related to Muslim culture, thus defining the boundaries of an imagined European identity. Pointing at cultural differences as a causal explanation for social, political and security issues often neglects the presence of similar phenomena in Europe (Ibid: 13), where gender inequality is far from being resolved, ethno-nationalist terrorism has only recently been tamed (e.g. IRA, ETA), and extreme-wing political terrorism periodically resurfaces (e.g. 2011 Norway attacks).

While culture can be used to reinforce geographical divisions, ENP discourses also recognise the presence of elements of proximity to EU values in partner countries. In fact, EU neighbours are not presented as homogeneous cultural and political entities. Rather, in EU narratives traits of "non-Europeanness" like political and religious radicalism, patriarchal rule and anti-liberal identities mostly belong to old autocratic political classes and generally to systems of powers that have lost touch with the more progressive masses. The "civil society" in ENP countries is an ontologically good CS, trapped in political systems that restrain its quest for liberal transformation, which is a messianic realisation of the natural course of history. With these assumptions, the EU's optimistic reaction and positive narratives vis-à-vis revolutions in the Neighbourhood should not come as a surprise. In these discourses, the Arab Spring was initially perceived as the exclusive manifestation of the democratic uprising of the secularised youth rather than that of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist

movements rising to power across the region, and a call for the EU "to support wholeheartedly the wish of the people in our neighbourhood to enjoy the same freedoms that we take as our right" (EC & HR, 2011a: 2). Similarly, Euromaidan protesters in Ukraine were only represented by the students brandishing EU flags, and EU statements made no relevant mention of the role of militants from Svoboda and Right Sector (see Ishchenko, 2016).

Arguably, CS in EU narratives is not synonymous with the best-representative sample of one country's non-governmental forces, but rather a cherry-picked selection of those forces that uphold European values. The extent to which this cherry-picking is also found in the practice of EU support to non-governmental actors in the region is open to discussion, and is one of the elements addressed in this contribution. At the declaratory level, this is the picture that emerges from the key documents defining the ENP after the beginning of the Arab Spring. According to the 2011 Joint Communication *A new response to a changing Neighbourhood*, in the area "civil society plays a pivotal role in advancing women's rights, greater social justice and respect for minorities as well as environmental protection and resource efficiency" and "empowers citizens to express their concerns, contribute to policymaking and hold governments to account" (EC & HR, 2011b: 4). But transformation towards liberal Western values is not just one among many paths that "civil society" might want to pursue, it is rather its natural course of action. When this willingness for change has not manifested itself yet, this is rather due to obstacles restraining this otherwise automatic evolution. Liberal change is already present at the heart of CS in neighbouring countries, but it might be sleeping or it might need the EU to act as a facilitator in a maieutic process where non-Western societies get to discover what they really want. For these reasons, "willingness to reform cannot be imposed from outside and the expectation for

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reform must come from within societies. EU policy can act as a catalyst in this process" (EC & HR, 2014: 8). The 2015 ENP Review also promised stronger support to CS, *inter alia* as one of the tools to "uphold and promote *universal values*" (EC & HR, 2015: 5). This CS has a key role to play against government sector's corruption and in holding state power accountable (ibid.: 6) in a Manichean dichotomy where non-governmental and private actors, including "civil society professionals" (ibid), seem to belong to an ideal community moved by liberal democratic values, as opposed to established powers holding their countries back. In sum, 'civil society' in EU discourse is arguably an abstraction, a projection of EU's ideal Self into its neighbourhood.

EU discourses and implicit definitions are not insulated from EU external action, and can potentially affect it in a variety of ways. From a social constructivist point of view (Rosamond, 2001; Risse & Maier, 2003; Checkel, 2004) discourse represents a source of power that establishes hierarchies and roles in society and defines identities. In more practical terms, ignoring or excluding social actors that do not fit EU's ideal representation of CS can potentially affect the way the EU engages with ENP and other third countries. EU's vision of CS based on a Western liberal bias can influence its role as an international actor supporting CSOs based on their status, agenda and capacity.

EU support to the cultural sector in the ENP: a case study

The following section analyses some multi-country programmes funding the cultural sector in the ENP East and South.

Culture in the ENP East

Instruments and programmes
To analyse EU cultural action in the Eastern neighbourhood, this case study looks at cross-border cooperation (CBC) programmes in 2014-2020. CBC has been chosen over two other cultural initiatives: the EaP Culture and Creativity Programme and Creative Europe. The former, which ended in early 2018 and was designed to enhance cultural action in EaP countries, did not provide sub-granting to local organisations (Interview 4) and thus falls out of the scope of the article. As for Creative Europe, while Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine joined it in the past years, it remains a programme targeting mainly EU member states (MS) cultural sectors.

Under the European Neighbourhood Instrument, CBC aims at enhancing cooperation between EU MS and those neighbours sharing land or sea borders. Similarly to the European Territorial Cooperation programmes, CBC initiatives do not target MS or neighbouring countries but rather those Eligible Territorial Units (ETUs) along shared land borders and sea basins. Under Thematic Objective 3 (TO3), CBC aims explicitly at the promotion of local culture and the preservation of historical heritage.

Out of the seventeen CBC programmes included in the Programming Document 2014-2020, seven targeted Eastern neighbourhood countries. Two additional criteria were adopted in this case study. First, the publication of relevant call of proposals for the period 2014-2020, in order to analyse their Terms of References and annexed documents. Second, the possibility for Eastern neighbourhood partners to receive funds under the programme as main applicants. Based on this selection, which further excluded two programmes, this case study reviews four land-border and one sea basin programmes. Programmes are listed in table 1.

Most of the selected programmes funded cultural projects under TO3. As an exception, Black Sea Basin (BSB) stakeholders defined TO1 and TO6, focusing respectively on business and environment protection, as primary objectives of the programme. However, as consultations highlighted the need to reflect some cultural aspects under economic issues, it was recommended priority 1.1 of the programme to promote "business and entrepreneurship in the tourism and cultural sectors" (MDRAP, 2015c).

Furthermore, Joint Operational Programmes (JOPs) provided in some cases relevant analyses on culture and CS. For instance, within BSB, the document identified some weaknesses in local organisations' limited networking and poor anchoring in society. Perhaps most importantly, while informal involvement was positively valued, stronger professionalisation was a goal to reach.

Similar aspects were highlighted in other programmes. In the SWOT Analysis of RO-MD JOP (MDRAP 2015a), the two major weaknesses identified in Moldova were weak expertise and co-financing capacities. In more general terms, other JOPs stressed the untapped potential of cultural and historical heritage (LLB and PBU) and the role that communities could play to preserve local identities (PBU and RO-MD). In particular, under RO-MD and RO-UA, and contrary to the other programmes, religious/cult

Programme	ETUs in Neighbouring countries	Total Budget in EUR	Budget on culture
Black Sea Basin (BSB)	<u>Ukraine</u>: Odessa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Sevastopol, Zaporosh'ye and Donetsk Oblasts, Crimea Republic, Sevastopol <u>Moldova</u>, <u>Georgia</u>, <u>Armenia</u>, <u>Azerbaijan</u>: the whole country	49,038,597.00	TO1 with cultural dimension 'Jointly promote business and entrepreneurship in the tourism and cultural sectors': 25,337,752.68.
Latvia-Lithuania-Belarus (LLB)	<u>Belarus:</u> Hrodna and Vitebsk Oblasts	74,000,000.00	TO3: 17,600,000.00
Poland-Belarus-Ukraine (PBU)	<u>Belarus</u>: Hrodna and Brest oblasts <u>Ukraine</u>: Volynska, Lvivska and Zakarpatska Oblasts	183,078,184.00	TO3: 32,272,159.47
Romania-Ukraine (RO-UA) (LLB)	<u>Ukraine</u>: Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpatska, Chernivtsi, Odesska Oblasts	60,000,000.00	TO3: 6,000,000.00
Romania-Republic of Moldova (RO-MD)	<u>Moldova:</u> the whole country	81,000,000.00	TO3: 22,024,402.00

TABLE 1. CBC PROGRAMMES ANALYSED IN THIS STUDY
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Programme	Call for Proposals analysed	Minimum amount	Maximum amount
BSB	1st Call for Proposals (2017)	500,000.00	1,500,000.00
LLB	1st Call for Proposals (2016)	100,000.00	1,500,000.00
LLB	2nd Call for Proposals (2017)	100,000.00	1,200,000.00
PBU	1st Call for Proposals (2016)	100,000.00	2,500,000.00
PBU	2nd Call for Proposals (2018)	20,000.00	60,000.00
RO-MD	1st Call for Proposals (Soft projects, 2018)	50,000.00	100,000.00
RO-UA	1st Call for Proposals (Soft Projects, 2018)	50,000.00	1,000,000.00

TABLE 2. CALLS FOR PROPOSALS ANALYSED IN THE FIVE PROGRAMMES AND GRANT RANGE
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

institutions were mentioned as possible beneficiaries of actions, suggesting that religious heritage was somewhat part of the broader objective of preservation and valorisation of local culture and identity.

<u>Financial support to cultural actors</u>
To analyse the funding mechanisms supporting cultural actors in CBC, this section reviews publicly available documents under the 'Call for Proposals' sections, with a focus on the documents 'Guidelines for Applicants', explaining the requirements of the programmes, and the Evaluation Grids, providing a framework for the assessment of proposals. Table 2 lists the seven Calls for Proposals reviewed.

Status
Generally speaking, all guidelines indicated that calls for proposals were open to regional, local or national public authorities, bodies governed by public law, and non-profit organisations, which include a wide range of CS forces. Also, annexes often provided examples of eligible organisations. With the notable exception

of LLB calls, in which bodies having partly industrial or commercial character could apply as partners of the projects, profit-making entities were not eligible. Overall, the legal status of the organisation was a necessary pre-requisite to apply for funding. Informal groups were therefore excluded from participating in the programs, as guidelines did not provide the possibility to 'formalise informal groups' or to partner with a formal applicant.

Agenda

Rules on eligibility gave some indications on potential exclusionary approaches related to the agenda of the organisations. As a first finding, guidelines seemed to provide little space for political groups. For instance, BSB included political parties as non-eligible actors, while other programs stressed that activities of a political or ideological nature were not funded. As an exception, PBU calls did not state any limitation but specified that those actions violating EU horizontal policy rules were not eligible.

When it comes to religious organisations, findings were more nuanced. On the one hand, in BSB organisations representing religious cults were clearly not eligible, while PBU Guidelines of the 1st call for Proposals specified that religious actions or activities were not funded. On the other hand, in RO-MD and RO-UA religious/cult institutions were listed as possible (co-)applicants. This also applied to PBU 2nd call, which included parishes as eligible for funding.

Finally, in four out of five programmes (PBU being the exception), evaluation grids marked the presence of one or more cross-cutting themes (environmental sustainability, gender equality, democracy and human rights). As an example, RO-MD evaluation grid assessed "positive influence on more than one cross cutting theme of the Programme, project's contribution during project lifetime and/or ex-post" (RO-MD, no date). Cross-cutting themes were marked out of five in the four programmes, although it should be specified that evaluation grids had different maximum scores (ranging from 95 within LLB to 125 in RO-MD and RO-UA).

Capacity

When it comes to the capacity requested by the Programmes, evaluation grids provided interesting insights. Three overall criteria were marked in all grids: previous experience on project management, proven financial capacity, and appropriate staff resources to run the projects. Previous implementation of EU or other

international projects was requested in all programmes, with the exception of PBU. Also, the grading scheme was stricter on the two bilateral programmes involving Romania on the one hand, and Ukraine/Moldova on the other hand. To get 2 points in the evaluation assessment, more than 50% of the project Partners should have already "participated in or managed at least 2 EU / other internationally funded projects" (RO-MD & RO-UA no date), while the applicant should have managed at least one EU or other international project. However, a 0 point evaluation did not prevent in principle an organisation from getting the grant.

Of course, any assessment on capacity should be carefully contrasted with the grant range of the calls, which are provided in table 2. On the one hand, it is undeniable that strict management and financial requirements were somewhat inevitable for larger projects. This is especially the case of the BSB, in which the minimum grant was 500,000 euros. However, these same rules also applied to smaller projects of other programs, and in particular to the PBU 2nd call and RO-MD, which funded relatively small cultural actions (see table 2). Overall, programmes did not look at the broader regional cultural sector, including both experienced and less experienced organisations. Rather, they tended to privilege the former for sub-granting and to exclude the latter not on the ground of eligibility rules, but rather of requested capabilities.

Last but not least, languages rules can assess the presence of exclusionary approaches. On this note, all the five analysed programmes did not reflect a concern of inclusion, as English was the only language that organisations could use to submit proposals. This applied even to RO-MD calls, in spite of the fact that participating countries shared the same official language. As an exception, in the case of LLB the call for proposals and video explanations were in four languages, while in some other cases technical documents (i.e. energetic audits) could be provided in local languages (i.e. Romanian for RO-MD calls).

Culture in the ENP South

Instruments and programmes

The following case study on the ENP South concerns the main post-Arab spring regional programme in the field of culture, MaC (2014-2017, 17 million euros), supporting media and culture for democratisation, development and stronger Euro-Mediterranean intercultural relations. MaC budget financed two

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service contracts and one call for proposals to launch operational programmes and projects. The two service contracts established sub-programmes for cultural policy reform (Med Culture – 3 million euros) and capacity development of the media sector (MedMedia – 5 million euros). The remaining 9 million euros were assigned through a call for proposals for capacity building of cultural operators and enhancement of freedom of expression in the media sector (EC, 2017). Two projects specifically focused on culture were funded under this call for proposals, and successively managed sub-granting towards local CSOs: SouthMed CV[1] (2 million euros) and "Drama, Diversity and Development"[2] (DDD) (1.9 million euros).

In establishing MaC, attention was dedicated to the need to reach the cultural sector in an as large and representative way as possible, although no explicit mention was made of the risk of only targeting a minority of Western-minded and better-technically and financially endowed formal organisations (see EC, 2017). In the framework of the programme, the EC underlined its commitment to the promotion of cultural diversity (ibid.: 6), and the need to expand its reach to rural and remote areas, both to train cultural operators and to enlarge audiences for cultural activities. At the same time, a need to internationalise and globalise the capacity of local cultural operators was stated (Ibid: 7-9), which signals that target groups besides already 'Westernised' actors, were deemed important. A certain awareness of the non-European nature of the cultural sector in the ENP South was also demonstrated, by listing as potential risks the low absorption capacity of funds (high) and the fact that cultural operators might prefer support from Gulf Countries (moderate to high) (Ibid: 10). Most importantly, the EC put emphasis on community outreach and inclusion as well as cross-cultural contacts. Target groups for the programme included religious and national minorities, while

religious organisations constituted more generic "stakeholders" (Ibid.: 10-11).

In terms of contacts with non-secular and non-Westernised actors, there was not a primary focus on including Islamic CS, but contacts are generally not hindered by EU instruments themselves. On the demand side, religious themes were hardly found in the discourse (e.g. in project proposals) of mostly independent and secular cultural organisations seeking for international funding (Interviews 1, 2, 3). Also, it is very rare that religious or political organizations try to apply for EU funding in culture (Ibid.), and exchanges mostly happen at the policy level. For example, EU programmes have aimed to create trialogues, bringing together the independent cultural sector with governments and institutional actors, which are often more conservative and have closer ties to Islam. A region-wide reflection on how to bridge the independent cultural sector with the "Central Islamic discourse" started with the 2010 first Conference on Cultural Policies in the Arab World, organised by the *Al Mawred al Thaqafy* with the European Cultural Foundation, and including several European actors. At the EU level, dialogues are facilitated both in bilateral and regional fora. An example comes from Med Culture. The programme accompanied Jordan towards the drafting of a national strategy for culture, serving as a facilitator and mediator between government services and cultural stakeholders. Independent cultural actors were mostly reached by the programme, and the government brought to the table more conservative cultural actors running state programmes. When debating over the inclusion of a definition of "Jordanian culture" in the strategy, "institutional" cultural actors insisted to explicitly mention Islam, which independent cultural stakeholders and Med Culture mostly opposed. After animated discussion, the solution was found in acknowledging that this religious reference is already

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[1] SouthMed CV aimed to "bring culture from the margins to the centre of the public sphere in the Southern Mediterranean, exploring its potential connections with economic, social and political development strategies" (SouthMed CV, 2018).
[2] DDD aimed to use culture "to promote diversity and challenge discrimination against minorities" (Med Culture, 2018).

present in the Jordanian constitution and therefore there was no need to restate it in the document (Interview 2).

The design and implementation of Med Culture and the two sub-granting projects also showed a certain attention to avoiding Euro-centric approaches by reaching local operators. Med Culture, SouthMed CV and DDD have websites in Arabic, French and English and have been managed by teams including mostly Arabic-speaking professionals, predominantly originating from Southern Mediterranean countries (See Med Culture 2018; DDD 2018; SouthMed CV 2018). Running these instruments in Arabic was fundamental in terms of outreach, allowing non-French and non-English speaking cultural actors to benefit from their activities and funding (Interviews 1, 2, 3).

Financial support to cultural actors

The analysis of the funding mechanisms put in place to support cultural actors also reflects a certain concern for inclusion, with some limitations. Table 3 takes into consideration some requirements and guidelines for applicants for DDD and SouthMed CV main calls for projects, based on the three indicators proposed in the methodology.

Status

In terms of status, requirements to be a registered organisation and absence of government constraints to receive foreign funding limit the reach of EU projects but are difficult to sidestep. However, to enhance inclusiveness and representativeness SouthMed

	DDD*	SouthMed CV**
Status		
Legal personality	YES	YES (main applicant)
Eligible	Registered arts or minority rights organisations. Lead applicant must be non-profit. If partners are for profit organisations, still no profit can be made from the project. Applicants embedded in or have excellent links with and the trust of the respective ethnic, religious or linguistic minority community.	*Main applicants* must be non-profit organisations. The participation of non-registered organisations as partners, with the exclusion of the main applicant, may be accepted in duly justified cases and insofar their existence can be proven (e.g. cultural and artistic groups or platforms of professionals having carried out activities).
Not eligible	Individual artists. Organisations non eligible to legally receive funding from abroad without constraint or requiring the permission of a Ministry or Government body for each grant.	
Geographical provenience	Organisations based and established (as demonstrated in the organisation's statutes) in ENP South programme countries. Even when part of a consortium.	Organisations legally registered in the eligible countries, and active in the cultural sector in the Southern Mediterranean region.
Agenda		
Not eligible		Events of religious or political character.
Reference to EU values	Only projects that challenge discrimination against minorities (e.g. land, identity, discrimination in the job market, physical attacks and hate speech, hate crime). Gender factoring is an evaluation criteria.	*Awareness-raising activities on issues such as cultural diversity, social inclusion, gender or environmental issues, among others.*
Aspects fostering inclusiveness	Selection criterion: strong links with minority organisations and communities.	For projects focusing on contributing to strengthening the role of culture at local, national and regional level, in cooperation with other stakeholders in the public sphere (e.g. organisations active in the social, educational or environmental fields, youth and cultural centres, schools, universities, libraries, local authorities, etc.).

▼

▼	DDD*	SouthMed CV**
	Capacity	
(Co-)applicants' experience and professionalization	Strong emphasis on experience. Substantial experience of running relevant and similarly complex arts projects. Good project management skills including the ability to raise required match funding.	Medium emphasis on experience. Previous experience and quality of the team evaluated, accounting for 25% of evaluation criteria (30% second call). Links with international and Euro-Mediterranean networks considered as a positive factor insofar the added value of this type of networking is clearly established.
Language of the proposal	French, Arabic or English.	English or Arabic. Second call: translation in English or French needed if submission in Arabic).

* This table only refers to the main grant activity of the project: two calls issued in 2014 and 2015. These were complemented by smaller calls. One for a film, open to individuals. The other for small grants for advocacy activities.
** This table refers to the two calls issued in 2015 and 2016.

TABLE 3: RELEVANT ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS AND APPLICATION GUIDELINES UNDER DDD AND SOUTHMED CV

Source: DDD[3] and SouthMed CV[4].

CV also opened to non-registered partners under some conditions. Strict principles of geographical provenience prevented organisations not rooted in the local context (e.g. European organisations) from competing for support. DDD and SouthMed CV predominantly worked with non-for profit organisations, even when this meant coaching local organisations to find co-funding opportunities (Interview 1, 3).

Agenda

Events of religious or political character were specifically non-eligible for funding under SouthMed CV. In fact, the project aimed at inclusion irrespective of religious credo and did not target specific religious groups (Interview 1). In the case of DDD, inclusiveness was mostly a matter of including minorities, be they religious (e.g. Christians), ethnic (e.g. Berber, Touareg, Black Africans etc.), linguistic (e.g. Tamazight speakers) or other fragile ones (refugees, migrants) – rather than getting in touch with non-secular and non-Westernised cultural actors per se (Interview 3). Also, exclusion of certain actors with political or religious affiliations that could be considered as part of broader CS, mostly did not depend on eligibility rules but on the nature of the target sector itself. On the one hand, the artistic sector is naturally more independent from political powers,

and mostly refuses to sing government-led tunes. On the other hand, although practice varies greatly, many forms of artistic expression are limited or prohibited under a strict interpretation of Islamic law and therefore the cultural and artistic sector is mostly detached from religious forces. In fact, it is very rare to find references to religious or politically sensitive factors in applications to programme initiatives (Interview 2). Therefore, the exclusion of religious and political actors in calls for proposals is rather a priori (Interview 3).

With reference to EU values, these are embedded in sub-granting projects, but the selection process itself was not focused on the presence of pro-EU language or EU cultural symbols, and rather prioritised local empowerment and capacity building (Interview 1).

Capacity

With reference to path dependency in funding, a small circle of internationally-funded organisations, experience and economic and administrative capacity to write and manage European projects were clearly valued. However, EU funding in culture has had a strong formal and informal capacity building dimension. For example, DDD aimed to target 'young' associations that had thus far only managed small grants, to give

[3] So Various documents related to grants activities: Calls for proposals, guidelines and evaluation criteria of Street Theatre, Film and Advocacy grants; List of selected, rejected and non-eligible applicants and projects accompanied by selection committee's comments on each application. Documents requested by the authors and retrieved by e-mail on April 30th,2018.
[4] Various documents related to grants activities: Calls for proposals, guidelines and evaluation criteria of the two rounds of calls held by the project; List of selected, rejected and non-eligible applicants and projects. Documents requested by the authors and retrieved by e-mail on May 10th, 2018.

them the possibility to manage a bigger project for the first time. Also, DDD grants for street theatre activities required a 25% match funding from the applicants, who were however helped by DDD itself to find co-funders (Interview 3). The same support for co-funding was operated by SouthMed CV (Interview 1).

In terms of language requirements, calls for proposals and participation to the activities predominantly accepted applications in Arabic, which was perceived to be a key factor to reach social groups representative of the local cultural sector (Interviews 1, 2, 3). However, at times organisations applying in Arabic were still required to be able to work in English and French for following activities. This should not be seen as a pure Northern cultural predominance but rather as a necessary measure to ensure communication between Southern participants themselves, who may otherwise speak very different national dialects of Arabic, or Hebrew, or other regional languages and thus be unable to work together effectively without resorting to colonial ones (Interview 2).

Selection of applicants: a case study

To corroborate the findings of this article, the current section provides a case study based on the two main calls for proposals issued by DDD for street theatre projects. The choice is due to the availability of detailed data concerning the selection process, including marks assigned to projects and applicants' profiles based on the selection criteria and qualitative comments on each application by the reviewers (DDD, no date). Only some of the selection criteria used for each call are relevant to assess the inclusiveness of EU's support towards local society, namely in call 1 (see table 4).

The second call for proposals evaluated projects based on 5 criteria. Criteria 2, 3 and 4 remained the same as above, but here they had to be assigned up to 20/100 points each. Altogether, the example of DDD can provide a representative overview of how the indicators identified in this article can be found in EU support to cultural operators in the Neighbourhood.

First, status proved to be important for the selection of potential candidates, although it did not top the list. Exclusion of projects on the basis of little links between the applicants and the relevant minorities or their capacity to reach certain areas were often mentioned as reasons for rejection in both calls. However, criterion 2 seemed to come after other considerations (e.g. strength and relevance of the project concerning DDD's objectives of challenging racism and discrimination experienced by a minority community). In fact, criterion 2 appeared to be slightly less central than others in call 1, and only ranked 6th/10 in terms of average weight on the final mark (9.78% *of final project marks on average*). Similar relevance was given to the same criterion in call 2, where it ranked 3rd/5, weighting 20.15%.

In terms of *agenda*, religious and political aspects did not figure as reasons for the exclusion of applicants, apart from when targeting very sensitive areas in the Israeli-Palestinian case or when supporting a minority religious group without putting it in dialogue with the broader society. As stated, little to no applications to EU programmes in culture come from religious or political organisations, for different reasons. Among selected projects in call 1, the criterion that most contributed to the final mark assigned by the reviewers was number 3 (10.96%), which signals the importance to select projects addressing relevant minority issues. The same

Indicator	Criterion
Status	Criterion 2 – Strong and credible links between the applicant(s) and minority organisations and minority communities to be featured in the drama. (up to 10/100 points)
Agenda	Criterion 3 – Does the featured minority community suffer serious discrimination and disadvantage? How relevant is the project to their situation? I.e. how likely is a street theatre project to influence or change negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviour against them? (up to 10/100 points)
	Criterion 9 – How well has gender been factored into the programme? (up to 10/100 points)
Capacity	Criterion 4 – Track record and current capacity of the applicant(s) in successfully managing projects of a similar complexity, involving similar issues and of a similar size. (up to 10/100 points)
	Criterion 5 – Ability of the applicant(s) to raise match funding within a reasonable time frame. (up to 10/100 points)

TABLE 4. SELECTION CRITERIA USED TO ASSESS THE INCLUSIVENESS OF EU'S SUPPORT
Source: Author's own elaboration.

criterion ranked 1st/5 in call 2 (21.79%). Finally, criterion 9, based on how gender had been factored into the projects, did not appear to be the most central in the selection process, ranking 7th/10 place in call 1 (9.42%).

Capacity of the applicants with respect to previous management of EU or other international projects was very central in the selection process, which could at first suggest a risk for path dependency in funding organisations that are already part of a small western-minded circle of actors, not entirely representative of local CS. In call 1, reviewers' comments put a strong emphasis on the capacity and previous experience in the management of similar projects, particularly funded by international donors or organisations in DDD's network. In the same call, the 2nd and 3rd most relevant criteria out of ten where number 4 (10,85%) and 5 (10,81%). Similarly, criterion 4 came 2nd/5 in call 2 (20,82%) where, however, reviewers rarely mentioned it as a factor for rejection. Most importantly, a strong dimension of capacity building towards associations which had only managed smaller grants, as well as a predominant focus on their track record in managing projects that were relevant to DDD activities (rather than simply large and foreign-funded), were emphasised in both the comments accompanying the selection process and in Interview 3. Also, there did not seem to be a selection bias in terms of language: despite small changes which could be due to other factors, applications in Arabic had similar chances to be approved compared to those in English and French. For the first call of DDD street theatre, 33 projects out of 65 valid applications were selected. More than one third of the projects (25/65) were presented in Arabic, and this percentage was also roughly reflected among the selected projects (11/33). For call 2, 53 out of 82 applications were selected for funding. Applications in Arabic amounted to 38 out of 82 valid and 23 out of 53 of those selected.

Conclusions

This article sought to assess whether the boundaries of what the cultural sector means for the EU are mostly based on a Eurocentric understanding of CS or rather on a more inclusive definition mediated with the nature of societies in partner countries. It started from the hypothesis that the EU supports ENP CS in the field of culture on the basis of its closeness to European standards, norms and values. The findings of the article highlight a mixed picture.

On the one hand, a Eurocentric understanding of CS prevails in EU discourses and is enforced upon CSOs by technical means. When it comes to the *status* of the organisations, in both Southern and Eastern neighbourhoods the legal status appeared to be a fundamental pre-requisite to apply, although in SouthMed CV non-formal groups could also participate and geographical requirements on status were used to ensure the genuinely local nature of applicants. Strict requirements on the capacities are in line with this approach. Previous experience in project management, and in particular EU or international projects, together with the presence of appropriate staff resources, were central in the selection process. As such, exclusion of less experienced and professionalised organisations on this ground could suggest a risk for path dependency, as the EU would fund in the long term only those western-minded groups of actors that do not represent the broader ENP CS. However, EU instruments are in some cases characterised by a strong dimension of capacity building towards less experienced associations, on the condition that their activities are strongly relevant to their focus and objectives. When it comes to the sub-indicator of language, contrasting results were found in the two regions. While in ENP East English was the only language that organisations could use to submit proposals, in the South, applications in Arabic were accepted in order to enhance inclusiveness and no language bias could be found.

On the other hand, the EU does not seem to impose strong requirements concerning the agenda of organisations and aims to be as inclusive as possible. While little space is provided to groups with political affiliation, this finding is more nuanced for religious groups as in some cases organisations, parishes, and other cult institutions are encouraged to apply for funding. Also, a structural factor should be taken into account, especially in the Southern neighbourhood: that is, the distance between the cultural sector and political or religious forces, with the former refusing to sing government-led tunes and the latter tending to limit heavily artistic expressions. This was also confirmed by a substantial absence of religious or politically sensitive references in applications to the programmes analysed.

In a comparative dimension of the two areas of the Neighbourhood, it appears that a concern of inclusion guided the EU especially in the South, as there was an attempt to (1) reach the cultural sector in an as large and representative way as possible and (2) provide more space to less formalised and skilled organisations. On the contrary, path dependency appeared to be more pronounced in the East, as calls for proposals did not include a dimension of capacity building,

neither open up opportunities to formalise informal groups. While it is impossible to infer from this case study an EU's overarching political strategy, a general EU approach to the role of CS in the Neighbourhood emerges from the broader analysis and cited literature: by projecting its understanding of CS as a force for liberal political change onto different socio-political contexts, the EU supports selected CSOs with the goal to support transformation towards more democratic and peaceful societies. The case study on the cultural sector presented here confirms this approach, while mitigating it with the finding of a clear effort made by the EU to reach organisations that genuinely represent local needs.

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