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European integration through ‘soft conditionality’. The contribution of culture to EU enlargement in Southeast Europe

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how the European Commission employs cultural policy to facilitate EU enlargement processes. Since 1989 the European Commission has funded cultural programs in accession states as a ‘soft’ complement to its ‘hard’ conditionality. It reflects a more general trend in which the EU employs alternative modes of governance to deal with resistance against EU interference in national affairs. By investing in culture, the EU hopes to stimulate transnational cooperation, economic growth, social cohesion and identification with the EU. However, the outcomes of these investments cannot be predicted. Characteristic for soft policy programs is that participating states are responsible for their eventual interpretation and implementation. By comparing the policies and practices of EU cultural investments in accession states Southeast Europe, and particularly in Serbia, this paper discusses the limits and possibilities of EU funded initiatives to enlargement revealing an increasing governing through soft conditionality.

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Introduction

Enlargement is a permanent item on the European Union’s (EU) agenda. From 1973 onwards the European Communities expanded from the original six to the current Union of 28 member states. Albania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey are currently in the EU accession process. The European Commission, local governments and affiliated organisations have developed initiatives to facilitate the accession processes of these countries. These are not limited to the fields of law, economy and politics, but increasingly involve the field of culture. Investments in the cultural sector should stimulate transnational cooperation, economic growth, employment, social cohesion and identification with the EU. Nevertheless, participation in EU funded cultural initiatives is voluntary, with an exception of those occasions under which culture directly falls under EU regulations.¹ The European Commission is therefore fully dependent on the commitment of the participating states. This raises questions about how the Commission aims to use investments in culture as a contribution to enlargement, about the effects of these investments, and how these investments are taken up in accession states.

By focusing on accession states in Southeast Europe and in particularly on Serbia, this article aims to find answers to these questions. First the relation between enlargement, Europeanisation, soft modes of governance and culture is explained. Then an overview of the actions of the most important Directorates Generals of the Commission is provided. Which actions do they support and for what reason? Finally, the article examines the local reception of these EU interventions in the field of culture in Serbia and Southeast Europe and how these interventions are translated into practices. It will become clear that

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the Commission manages to steer cultural initiatives in accession states by means of several strategies of Europeanisation. By introducing new forms of multi-level governance, strictly adhering to funding criteria and insisting on European partnerships, accession states adopt approaches to culture based on Western European models revealing similar trends as the 'hard' conditionality policies.

Enlargement, Europeanisation, soft modes of governance and culture

Over the last four decades the European Community has not only 'deepened' European integration, it has also 'widened' and started to include more and more European countries. Both processes are regarded essential to the success of European unification. The first enlargement rounds of Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom, in the 1970s involved comparatively minor negotiations.² Later enlargement rounds – that concerned the former authoritarian states Greece, Portugal and Spain – were subject to much more discussion. The Community members asked for certainty about economic sustainability, levels of democracy and a well-functioning state apparatus. In 1989 the European Community introduced the Copenhagen Criteria that set clear conditions for membership. Applicant countries had to adjust their political structures, economic situation and administrative and institutional frameworks to EU standards to become eligible for EU membership. After 2004, application procedures became even more strict and for the remaining applicant states additional conditions were introduced such as the establishment of good relations with neighbours, addressing minority issues and the insurance of stability (Grabbe 2014).

The EU increasingly manifested itself as reformer of domestic infrastructures and used the attractiveness of its membership incentive to pursue broader political goals. The attitude towards accession states reveals a more general attempt to 'modernise' peripheral, less economically advanced areas (Ilieva and Wilson 2015, 94). As Blagojević (2009, 99) argues, [accession states in Southeast Europe] are both perceived different from and like the West, which has led to 'the promotion of policy measures which should help those societies to adjust to the centre and to speed up their modernisation'. Accession states have to undertake a series of structural reforms predicated on Western European politico-economic models. This asymmetry plays a role in the perception of the EU in enlargement settings (Ilieva and Wilson 2015, 94) which has been studied extensively within its own subfield of Europeanisation studies (Sedelmeier 2011).

Two approaches dominate this subfield. One strand sees Europeanisation as the top-down implementation of European rules and regulations (i.e. Ladrech 1994; March and Olsen 1998; Knill and Lehmkuhl 1999; Börzel and Risse 2000). It examines the frequent demands for wholesale institutional reform on applicant countries (Denti 2014, 18). The other strand in this subfield sees Europeanisation as a two-way process in which national and supranational levels interact. Studies within this subfield observed that some initiatives resonated better than others and argued that Europeanisation could not be limited to the top-down implementation of EU rules and regulations (i.e. Dyson and Goetz 2003; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Grabbe 2006; Epstein and Sedelmeier 2009; Schimmelfennig 2009). Even though conditionality steers accession countries into certain directions, on different levels – local, national, regional and European – actors adapt to, respond to, resist, and influence EU incentives (i.e. Radaelli 2003; Delanty and Rumford 2005; Rumford 2009).

Enlargement, Europeanisation and soft modes of governance

The latter approach to Europeanisation gained in popularity, especially since the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy from 2000 onwards. This action and development plan for the economy of the EU introduced new forms of governance in those fields in which member states are hesitant to transfer sovereignty. Examples of these fields are culture, education, environment and social affairs. In these fields, the Commission looked for ways to open decisional processes beyond and outside formal legal arenas (Borrás and Radaelli 2011). Instead of using the traditional EU Community Method based on binding legislation, in these fields the EU has resorted to instruments based on 'voluntarism, subsidiarity, flexibility, participation, policy integration, and multi-level integration' (Borrás and Jacobsson 2004,

189). Additionally, these soft modes of governance institutionalised multi-stakeholder negotiation and provided room for non-state actors such as business people, experts and civil society organisations (Barry 2002, 147).

Again, there are different perspectives on the effects of such soft modes of EU governance. Some consider the effects of the soft modes of governance as rather limited. They observe discrepancies between soft modes of governance and more traditional forms of decision-making and discuss the low degree of integration of these methods within national policy-making communities (i.e. Scharpf 2002; Héritier 2003; Idema and Kelemen 2006; Citi and Rhodes 2007). Another position is taken by those who argue that soft modes of governance are implicit steps towards further integration (i.e. Cram 2011; Diedrichs, Reiners, and Wessels 2011). They argue that the soft modes of governance penetrate national systems changing internal policy, and re-configuring political institutional frameworks (Szyszczak 2006, 493). Or, from a somewhat different angle, some see its influence in terms of the emergence of a European vocabulary or master discourse which leads to a common cognitive and ideational framing of policy on a European level (De la Porte 2002; Guillen and Alvarez 2004; Zeitlin 2005; Kvist and Saari 2007; Lendvai 2007).

Despite the disagreement on the actual effects of soft modes of governance in academia, soft modes of governance are widely applied by the EU in enlargement settings. This is partly unavoidable because accession states do not fall under the legal scope of the EU. EU incentives cannot be imposed in accession states, but are taken up on a voluntary basis. As such all EU action in enlargement settings can be considered soft. However, since conditionality is a requirement for EU membership, it can be considered a hard measure of integration. The EU complements these hard measures with investments in policy areas that are not part of conditionality and does so by using soft modes of governance.

Enlargement, Europeanisation and culture

Culture is one of those softer fields in which the Commission invests to complement its harder conditionality policy. Even though culture forms a chapter of the *Acquis Communautaire* and is thus part of EU conditionality policy, in this chapter it is stated that in line with article 151 of the EC Treaty, participation in cultural initiatives is voluntary and based on the principle of subsidiarity (European Commission 2016). This also applies to the EU funded cultural projects in enlargement settings. The European Commission invests in culture in accession states because it is convinced that culture contributes to EU integration. Politically, investments in culture are seen as a means to show the accession state that it is culturally part of Europe and that it deserves a role in the co-construction of European culture and identity. Socio-economically, investments in culture can stimulate developments which are relevant to the wider accession process and conditionality policy. Culture is a means to an end: the facilitation of wider EU objectives.

Mapping EU investments in culture in enlargement settings

The EU invests in culture in enlargement settings due to its assumed added value to European integration. The Commission has however, not one single approach to culture. Article 151 of the Maastricht Treaty asks for the horizontal integration of culture in the diverse policy fields of the EU.³ This explains why different Directorates General invest in culture. In the context of enlargement, the Directorate General of European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement (DG-NEAR), the Directorate General of Regional Cooperation (DG-REGIO) and the Directorate of Education and Culture (DG-EAC) are most important.⁴ Despite their shared interest in the political and economic value of culture, the approaches to culture differ amongst these Directorates General depending on their specific policy objectives.

DG-NEAR: culture, conditionality, and mainstream participation

DG-NEAR has invested in culture from 1989 onwards. Its actions in the field of culture are restricted to grant schemes which is typical for many of the EU actions in enlargement settings. By means of its funding mechanisms DG-NEAR aims to facilitate the implementation of the *Acquis Communautaire* and thus the

future accession of applicant states. The first funding mechanism which was used to invest in culture was PHARE (Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies) which was established in 1989 to support institutional and capacity-building in accession states.⁵ PHARE was used for the financing of cultural initiatives when it contributed to this purpose. For example, in Romania PHARE funding was invested in a project that examined the cultural dimension of democracy (Chetaru 2006, 24). In Bulgaria PHARE was used to invest in cultural tourism to stimulate socio-economic development in the region.⁶

The second funding instrument of DG-NEAR was CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation) which was introduced in 2001 and ran parallel to PHARE. CARDS focused specifically on the Western Balkans and its investments had to contribute to the Stabilisation and Association Process of the countries in this region.⁷ Most projects funded by CARDS focused on cross-border cooperation and socio-economic development related to tourism. Similar to PHARE, culture was not the primary objective of this funding instrument. Instead culture had to contribute the reconstruction, stabilisation, internationalisation and socio-economic development of the region.

The immediate follow up of PHARE and CARDS and its replacement since 2007 has been the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). IPA funding is specifically targeted at the facilitation of accession processes. As stated in the quick guide to the IPA programming 2014–2020: ‘Financial assistance needs to be programmed following a strategic and coherent approach, tailored to the specific needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and focused on key priorities which are relevant for the path to accession’ (European Commission 2014a, 31). A civil servant at DG-NEAR explains how this determines investments in culture:

Culture and education is normally not the first chapter to be opened. It does not play a big role in comparison to the more strict accession criteria. But because it matters and is important for so many people, there is still a good amount of money invested in it. It stimulates mobility, people-to-people networks and cooperation with civil society. These processes are relevant to enlargement.⁸

Since 2014 IPA investments are also used to pay the entrance fee for the participation of accession countries in the mainstream Creative Europe Program of DG-EAC.⁹ Such participation in mainstream programs is increasingly brought forward as an important means to maintain impetus for enlargement in countries for which accession is continuously being delayed. As explained by a desk officer at DG-NEAR:

We used to use IPA funding to invest in projects that were particularly developed for the Western Balkans. We are slowly drifting away from such specific regional approach to ‘normal’ cooperation. The idea is to include the region in EU mainstream programs instead of excluding them from EU action.¹⁰

By allowing accession states from the Western Balkans to take part in the Creative Europe Program, the Commission hopes to decrease the risk that the region distances itself from the EU even before membership of the EU is obtained.

DG-REGIO: culture, cohesion and cross-border cooperation

DG-REGIO also invests in cultural initiatives in accession countries. Like DG-NEAR it works through grant schemes. Its main funding instruments are the Structural and Investment Funds (SIF).¹¹ These funds have been established in 1989 and finance multi-annual programs designed to promote economic development in the poorer areas of the EU. In its investments, DG-REGIO closely adheres to this focal area of cohesion and to the larger EU agenda which currently focuses on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The funds can be used to support projects in the field of culture but only when they are tailor-made to address the specific needs of the DG. As is stated in the Thematic Guidance Fiche for Desk Officers: ‘Investments in culture that do not have sustainable economic impacts should not be a priority for the EDRF (European Commission 2014b, 3)’.

Since the SIF are only reserved for EU member states, accession states only indirectly benefit from this funding instrument. They receive funding when they cooperate with EU member states that are supported by the SIF. For example, INTERREG – a funding instrument that is used for the implementation of the EU cohesion policy – has financed many initiatives that included EU member states.¹² Moreover, accession states have been involved in the Macro Regions which are partly funded by DG-REGIO to address common challenges within the same geographical area (European Commission 2013, 2).

In these projects in which accession states take part funding from DG-REGIO is combined with funding from DG-NEAR. This procedure is known as the 'matching funds' principle. Member states agree to allocate parts of the ERDF envelope for cross-border cooperation programs at EU external borders under the condition that at least equivalent amounts are provided by IPA. The funds are then pooled together and spent indifferently on either side in Member and non-Member States (European Parliament and the Council 2013b, 266, 267). Since these projects have to contribute to cohesion and growth the focus is primarily on infrastructure and tourism.

DG-EAC: mainstream participation and transnational cooperation

DG-EAC is the third Directorate General that invests in cultural initiatives in accession states. Already in 1996 and 1997 accession states could participate in the Raphael, Kaleidoscope and Ariane programs (European Commission 2004). However, this participation was rather negligible. At the time, most of the applicant states in Southeast Europe were involved in conflicts and participation in cultural initiatives was not a priority. After the conflicts, countries in Southeast Europe started to participate in the MOSAIC program and the Regional Program for Cultural and Natural Heritage in Southeast Europe which were projects of the Council of Europe.¹³ From 2000 onwards accession states in Southeast Europe started to participate in EU funded cultural initiatives. Serbia, Turkey and Croatia participated in 2003 as partners in CREDO, a multimedia music project about ethnic and religious conflict. Additionally, in 2004 the CIMET program was supported which invested in performing arts and contemporary dance in Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia.¹⁴ The share of accession states was small in comparison to that of EU member states, however over the years, accession countries increasingly started to cooperate in these initiatives.¹⁵

From 2014 onwards, DG-EAC officially allowed accession states as full members in the Creative Europe Program. Accession states had to pay an entrance fee and sign a Memorandum of Understanding.¹⁶ In this Memorandum accession states must promise to take the necessary measures for the national coordination and organisation of these initiatives in accordance with the relevant provisions in the regulation establishing the program (European Commission 2014c). By allowing accession states to participate in the mainstream Creative Europe Program, DG-EAC hopes that good practices and benchmarks set by EU member states will somehow spill over to accession states.¹⁷ Considering that in many of the accession countries Cultural Ministries are still facing many difficulties reorganizing themselves after Communism and the conflicts of the 1990s (Čopić 2011), the hope is that the Memorandum encourages accession countries to put certain structures and mechanisms in place.

Consistent with the other funding programs of the EU, the aims and ambitions of DG-EAC are determined for each funding period. The first program, Culture 2000, focused on dialogue, knowledge dissemination, cultural diversity, common European heritage, economic development, and the participation of citizens in the EU (European Parliament and the Council 1999). Culture 2007–2013, stressed the transnational mobility of cultural players, the transnational circulation of cultural and artistic products and the development of intercultural dialogue. Moreover, corresponding to the Lisbon Strategy, the program emphasised the contribution of culture to the European economy (European Parliament and the Council 2006). The most recent program, Creative Europe (2014–2020), emphasises the strengthening of the trans- and international capacity of the European cultural and creative sectors and the investments in cultural industries (European Parliament and the Council 2013a, 226).

DG-EAC emphasises that it takes a different – less instrumental – approach to culture than the other Directorate Generals. As the head of the Creative Europe program explains:

In our case it is cooperation that counts. [...] What we want is something with real culture and real cultural bridges with people that are for the full 100% involved in culture. [...] We are still rather culturally driven and not so much by the demands on the ground.¹⁸

Indeed, at DG-EAC the intrinsic value of culture – culture as an end in itself – is still supported. The projects it supports emphasise the value of exchange and platforms for cooperation. Nevertheless, the economic dimension has gained weight in the past few years (Littotz-Monnet 2012; Psychogiopoulou

2015, 239). Consistent with the Europe 2020 objectives, the Creative Europe program increasingly emphasises the competitiveness of the European cultural and creative sectors.

Steering without coercion: using culture to facilitate European integration

Despite their differences in emphasis, the different Directorates General eventually all hope to facilitate European integration by means of investing in culture. DG-NEAR hopes to facilitate the implementation of its conditionality policy and include accession states more directly in mainstream EU activities. DG-REGIO hopes to stimulate cohesion and sustainable growth in an area which will be subject to cohesion policy after its future accession. Finally, DG-EAC hopes to extend its network and expertise in accession states with rather traditional approaches to culture and prepare them for future cooperation in EU governance structures.

Investments in EU culture are therefore a means to legitimise a broader realm of EU policies. As Banu Karaca argues: 'We can witness not just the governance of culture and the arts (the "traditional" focus of cultural policy), but the attempt to govern *through* culture (2009, 36): This governing through culture is by no means self-evident. Even though the Commission has clear ideas behind its investments, it is dependent on the actions of the participating states and their willingness to integrate the EU objectives into their own frameworks of action. To influence the course of its investments without being coercive, the EU makes use of a range of strategies. By doing so the Commission hopes to steer EU funded cultural initiatives in the direction of European integration.

Introducing new forms of multi-level governance

The first strategy is the introduction of new forms of multi-level governance. In the EU funded cultural initiatives actors are requested to cooperate on different levels – national, regional and supranational. This creates an interdependency between national actors such as local governments and supranational actors such as the Commission which co-construct EU funded initiatives. The principle of shared management is one of these forms of multi-level governance which is introduced by DG-NEAR and DG-REGIO and determines the organisation of their funding programs. Shared management means that the Commission delegates the responsibility, the management and the control of the funded initiatives to the eligible countries. To make that work, the countries are requested to set up management and control systems which comply with the requirements of the funding instruments of both Directorates General (European Parliament and the Council 2012, 35). The Commission plays only a supervisory role and asks for regular reporting in the form of strategy papers, strategic frameworks and operational programs (European Parliament and the Council 2014a, 2014b). In these reports the conditions, priorities and targets for financial assistance are spelled out for each concerning funding period. Based on these reports the Commission reviews progress made towards delivering expected results.

Due to this management and control system EU cultural initiatives funded by IPA and SIF have become considerably bureaucratised. Engaging in these projects involves regular paperwork, knowledge of EU templates and adherence to the objectives of the concerning DG. The Commission considers these monitoring processes as highly relevant, because the funding for IPA and SIF comes directly from the European tax payers. In the words of a policy analyst at DG-REGIO: 'Dead-rate investments have to be avoided and in particular in a field [culture] that does not necessarily a priori contributes to jobs and growth.'¹⁹

At DG-REGIO this monitoring process has become ever more tightened due to the publication of the so-called 'Barca Report'. This report evaluated the EU Cohesion Policy and use of the SIF. It came with rather firm conclusions on the European Commission's discretion over funding. It argued that 'The "conditionalities" governing the provision of finance to Member States and Regions [...] were often turned into "homogeneous prescriptions" liable to be bypassed or downplayed' (Barca 2009, XVI). The Commission has since started to take on a greater role in evaluating the performance of EU funded programs while detailed involvement in programming and program management is left in the hands of the participating countries (Bache et al. 2011, 6; Baun and Marek 2014, 106, 107).

The principle of shared management does not only show the influence of the Commission as supervisor. It also reveals the actual limits of the Commission and the relative power of the participating states. As some have argued, the European Commissions' receding role in areas of programming, the allocation of funding and program monitoring, and its increased focus on strategic guidance and evaluation is an actual outcome of member states successfully exercising their 'gatekeeping' capacity and thus maintaining a firm grip on the implementation process (Bachtler and Mendez 2007, 555, 556). The Commission must operate in this situation of flexibility and rigidity in which it can only steer, but not impose. As a civil servant at DG-NEAR describes this: 'We should not empower EU policies in funds and projects without impacting on national policy. However, by targeting national governments we also risk resistance. Eventually they can still do what they want.'²⁰ Due to this 'national gatekeeping' many projects in the field of culture are initiated and considered for funding without changing local and national conditions (see Vos 2013). Shared management provides frameworks of policy-making, but no guarantees regarding its eventual implementation.

Another European mode of governance that determines EU funded cultural initiatives and involves actors on different levels is the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). DG-EAC makes use of this instrument in its cultural initiatives. The OMC was introduced at the Lisbon European Council in 2000 to achieve greater convergence towards EU goals in those areas in which member states were hesitant to give up sovereignty (European Council 2000). The idea behind the OMC was to commit member states to achieve joint policy goals without requiring homogenisation of domestic policy regimes (Hemerijck and Berghman 2004; Zeitlin 2005). This would be achieved by means of defining certain policy goals, establishing indicators and benchmarks, comparing best practices, adopting certain measures and performing periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review (European Parliament and the Council 2009: point 37).

There is not one kind of OMC that applies for all EU policy fields (Borrás and Radaelli 2014, 131). Typical for the Culture OMC is that it does not include benchmarking, target-setting, or monitoring, but works with a flexible, non-binding framework primarily meant to stimulate cooperation around a few strategic objectives (European Council 2007, 3). As part of the OMC, representatives from different EU member states regularly gather in working groups. This results in reports that form the basis behind the Work Plan on Culture which presents the EU level priorities and activities for each funding period.²¹ In this Work Plan, priorities are defined and a shared discourse is established which shapes the conditions within which national policies and actors operate to become eligible for European funding. The effects of this framing of culture might be particularly felt in accession states that are excluded from the OMC. They must integrate strategic objectives and best practices from EU member states into their actions to obtain EU funding.

Adhering to strict funding criteria

Strict adherence to funding criteria is the second strategy employed by Commission to steer its investments in culture. By insisting on these funding criteria, the European Commission acts as a gatekeeper by trying to steer project proposals towards its broader policy objectives. This works in different ways. As already shown, in case of DG-NEAR and DG-REGIO the conditions, priorities and targets for financial assistance are defined in the strategy papers and operational programs. As explained by a civil servant of DG-NEAR: 'By approving the strategy papers we dictate which kinds of activities receive money. By doing so we steer the organisations towards EU objectives. Currently, these objectives are determined by the acquis and the Europe 2020 targets.'²²

In case of DG-EAC, for each funding program different criteria apply.²³ As already shown, the priorities for these funding calls are elaborated in the Work Plan on Culture which is established for each funding period of seven years. Additionally, for each individual call the executive body of DG-EAC, the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) has developed a specific rating system. Parameters are set as to which priorities should be touched upon, how programs should be organised, and how policies should operate. For example, cooperation projects focus specifically on the development of international cultural activities and the establishment of networks and audiences (EACEA 2014), while European platform projects focus on the development of emerging talents and

the mobility and visibility of artists and creators (European Commission 2014d). EACEA works with a large database of 4000 experts from EU countries to assess the different proposals. By doing so EACEA aims to make sure that decision-making is as objective as possible, that the quality of the proposals takes precedence and that the legal framework is adhered to.

For accession states, strict adherence to funding criteria means adjusting their local approaches to culture to mainstream methods, best practices and priorities which are defined by the Commission and EU member states. Consequently, these proposals are assessed by a team of experts from EU member states. This reveals a situation of asymmetry in which accession states are requested to modernise their approaches to culture in conditions which differ considerably from many of the EU member states. This was also observed by a representative of EACEA: 'The current applicant states have not been involved in the making of the program and have to adhere to all its rules and regulations which often do not correspond to their local conditions.'²⁴ Participating in EU funded cultural initiatives in applicant states means compliance to conditions set by EU member states and resembles more traditional enlargement procedures.

Insistence on European partnerships

The third strategy used by the Commission to steer cultural initiatives has been the insistence on European partnerships in the allocation of funding. For the different Directorates General these partnerships are seen as crucial to fulfil their different policy objectives. For DG-NEAR and DG-REGIO cross-border cooperation initiatives facilitate social and economic cohesion and good neighbourly relations. For DG-EAC the transnational character of projects facilitates transnational competitiveness, circulation and cooperation in the field of culture (European Parliament and the Council 2013a). Another reason behind this insistence on European partnerships is that all Directorates General believe that transnational cooperation leads to competition for different funding instruments and that 'best practices' become guiding. In the words of a civil servant at DG-EAC: 'Participating in the programs is an exercise. At the beginning countries are partners. After several years, they have seen the best practices in the field, have matured, and start to act as project leaders.'²⁵

This insistence on European partnerships has a few direct and indirect consequences. First, shared cross-border challenges on the local as well as on the European level determine the interpretation of the EU funded cultural programs. For example, many programs focus on minority issues, ecological threats, employment and youth involvement.²⁶ Second, diplomatic relations determine many of the partnerships in the field. For example, Slovenia tends to cooperate with Serbia and not with Croatia with which political relations are strained.²⁷ Similar patterns appear elsewhere in Europe, where the so-called 'Nordic countries' tend to cooperate closely while Italy focuses more directly on its Mediterranean partners. These diplomatic bonds are often rooted in history and determined by cultural resemblances, but also influenced by more structural divisions in Europe concerning the interpretation of cultural policy between the Northern and Southern parts of Europe. The North tends to encapsulate culture within an instrumental logic focusing on creative industries, while the South tends to resist this new European agenda emphasizing that cultural expressions should not play to a global market (Litzo-Monnet 2012, 513, 514). A third effect which in particular relates to accession states is that in these partnerships accession states take up the role as partners and not as project leaders. Due to financial shortages, a lack of experience with EU funding mechanisms and political instability, accession states do not manage to coordinate large cooperation projects and thus depend on more successful European partners such as Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Slovenia and Italy.²⁸ Despite the Commission's mission to include accession states in mainstream policies, cooperating in EU funded cultural initiatives still entails catching up with core EU member states.

Determining the local impact of EU funded cultural initiatives

The strategies used by the European Commission to steer the EU funded cultural initiatives impact on the ways in which these initiatives are organised and interpreted. The first strategy of the Commission,

the introduction of multi-level frameworks of cooperation, has led to new constellations of power and interdependence between the European Commission and the accession states. The second strategy, the strict adherence to funding criteria, has implicitly introduced a new form of conditionality in accession states. Finally, the third strategy, the insistence on European partnerships, has led to asymmetries in Europe determined by forerunners and laggards and to the emergence of networks determined by diplomatic relations. These developments influence the ways in which EU funded cultural initiatives are received and interpreted in accession states in Southeast Europe and thus on the Europeanisation processes brought about.

The local reception of new forms of multi-level governance

The introduction of multi-level frameworks of cooperation and shared management has particularly influenced the work of those that act as mediators between national representatives and the European Commission. These actors act as so-called 'front-line workers' (Clarke et al. 2015, 25–27). They have to convey the messages of the European Commission and are responsible for the interpretation and implementation of the EU funded initiatives on the national level. One of those mediators is the Serbian European Integration Office (SEIO) which is responsible for the management and control systems for projects funded by DG-NEAR and DG-REGIO. SEIO perceives this role as problematic. An employee at SEIO explains this:

Shared management means that the Commission leaves the responsibility for the funded projects in the hands of the target countries. The Commission does not have enough knowledge of local settings which is why it leaves responsibility to SEIO. This places SEIO in a difficult position. We have to mediate messages of the Commission which often clash with local conditions and have to do this while the Commission is hardly ever present.²⁹

In the experience of the local mediators, the two Directorates-General literally 'govern at a distance' (Miller and Rose 2010). This complicates their work because they have to take responsibility for the eventual failure of these projects while the Commission remains distant.

This governing at a distance becomes particularly problematic when the 'wrong' projects receive funding due to a lack of insight in the local circumstances in which these projects have to be developed. This was acknowledged by the Commission. A civil servant at DG-NEAR refers to this phenomenon as the risk of 'bureaucratic inertia'. As he phrases it: 'There is a budget of 200 million, and many project proposals are sent. It is almost impossible to determine the real quality of the projects. What do they know? What do we know?'³⁰ While the Commission wants to ensure that it reaches its policy goals, the system of shared management complicates this which might result in an actual backfiring of Europeanisation processes. In the words of the representative at SEIO:

By investing more in projects based on content, the Commission could provide a real incentive and motivation behind the organization of these project. The Commission seems primarily concerned – and I would say obsessed – with the procedures that have to be followed. This kills the visibility and image of the EU and damages its status in Serbia.³¹

A somewhat different development can be discerned regarding the projects funded under DG-EAC. DG-EAC also works with a system of local representatives and makes use of Creative Europe Desks – formerly Cultural Contact Points. These desks are supported through national institutions, but are also contractually bound to DG-EAC. They have to mediate between the Commission and local actors in the field of culture and provide assistance in the application for funding. The difference between these desks in comparison to the institutions that work under DG-NEAR or DG-REGIO is that DG-EAC does not take up a supervisory role. Participating states are the sole responsible actors in the implementation and monitoring of the cultural initiatives funded by DG-EAC. However, like the projects funded by DG-NEAR and DG-REGIO, the employees at these desks have to transmit the strategic objectives of DG-EAC while these objectives clash with local circumstances. Often the Desks are not supported by their national governments, deal with great disparities between the public and private sectors in their country, and are dependent on funding and expertise while both are not available.

The local reception of funding criteria as a soft form of conditionality

The strict adherence to funding criteria means compliance to conditions set by the Commission and EU member states and has thus introduced a soft form of conditionality in accession states. The effect of this conditionality has been that increasingly projects are developed that try to tick as many of the boxes of the European Commission in terms of values, objectives, standards and organisation (cf. Welz 2015, 4, 5). This has led to an increasing emphasis on form rather than content. In Serbia many cultural initiatives have been developed based on strict adherence to the formats asked for on the EU level. However, such focus on form instead of on content is hard to sustain. In the words of a representative at SEIO:

We see that quite a lot of projects do not make it because they do not conform to the formats asked for while their content is very relevant. Other projects make it which are perfect regarding its form, but do not make much impact content-wise. This insistence on form is a direct consequence of the approach taken by the European Commission that emphasizes the use of particular formats.³²

For the projects supported by DG-NEAR and DG-REGIO this means that culture is framed as an expedient to social economic and political change reflecting the policy objectives of these two Directorates General. The situation is somewhat different regarding the projects funded by DG-EAC. In these projects accession states are often asked to become part of applications and thus other countries take responsibility for the content of the projects. Moreover, the objective of DG-EAC to stimulate transnational cooperation is easier to bring into practice. However, in the practical implementation of the projects supported by the different Directorates-General, participants from accession states face similar difficulties. Even though the national governments of accession states like Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia promise their support in the applications made, these governments often lack resources for the additional funding or have decided to invest it in other kinds of projects.³³ Additionally, the governments of most of the accession states in Southeast Europe have no clear strategy concerning their international investments in the field of culture, struggle with political instability, and generally lack financial and human resources to invest in EU initiatives.

The soft conditionality of the Commission has thus led to the establishment of projects that emphasise the functional use of culture even though national conditions might not necessarily allow for such projects to be brought into practice. The emphasis on this new approach to culture is a result of the attempts to steer programs towards mainstream methods, best practices and priorities defined by the Commission and the EU member states. This reframing of culture is reason for optimism as well as pessimism. As the local representative of 'Take Over' one of the funded cultural projects in the region illustrates this:

The introduction of European approaches to culture is a good thing. We need this to improve our cultural sector, strengthen cultural diplomacy and find new possibilities to fund cultural initiatives in the region. However, at present, local conditions hinder this process and structural change from happening.³⁴

The local reception of European partnerships

The insistence on cooperation in European partnerships has led to the development of diplomatic networks and the positioning of accession states as partners in EU funded initiatives. Both developments are received rather positively in accession states in Southeast Europe. In case of Serbia representatives of different cultural institutions and organisations argue that participation in these partnerships means engaging in projects that would otherwise have been impossible to take part of.³⁵ A participant in the 'ENARC project' further explains this:

We do not have the capacity to be the coordinator of these kinds of projects. It asks for so much administration and we lack the staff and skills to deal with this. In Vienna where the main administration of our project is based, they have a separate department that deals with these administrative matters. They have the capacity, the skills and the knowledge needed to pull these kinds of grand cooperative European projects.³⁶

Cooperation in partnerships is thus seen as an advantage as it provides opportunities to learn without dealing with all the administrative work.

Additionally, local pioneers active in many cultural institutions and organisations in Southeast Europe use these kinds of partnerships as an opportunity to operate more independently from national governments that are generally not very supportive of international projects in the field of culture. These pioneers were already active during the former Yugoslavia, and formed a counterweight to the emerging authoritarian regimes in the 1990 (Dragičević-Šešić 2011, 41–43). This scene has therefore always been dependent on international support and are part of a wide international network. In particular, the Soros Foundation had a large impact. The foundation played a significant role in the period from 1989 to 2003 in the development of an independent, flexible, and dynamic third sector in the field of arts and culture in East and Southeast Europe (Varbanova 2007, 52, 53). In the absence of funding from the Soros Foundation, many of the actors that were part of this third sector now look for opportunities to participate in new European partnerships.

So even though there is an asymmetry noticeable regarding the participation in European partnerships in which accession countries take up the position as partners, the asymmetry is accepted by many local actors. As argued by a representative of the Belgrade Design Week: 'We are dependent on resources from elsewhere and need the international network to fulfil our plans.'³⁷ This development is actively supported by DG-EAC:

We encourage applicant countries to team up with stronger partners avoiding frustration and disappointment. For a little cultural operator somewhere in Montenegro to prepare a project costs lot of money. And then they fail. And they fail a second time. They get disillusioned, give up and stop applying. That is why these projects should be pulled by others.³⁸

Cooperating in European partnerships offers possibilities to reform local approaches to culture. Where local governments are not inclined to change their approach to culture, actors in the private sector find opportunities to do this themselves.

Concluding words

By means of its investments in culture in accession states the European Commission seeks to facilitate European integration processes. It emphasises the value of culture as political and economic resource and by doing so assumes that culture contributes to other European policy objectives. For DG-NEAR investing in culture is a means to facilitate European integration processes, for DG-REGIO it is a means to stimulate cohesion and sustainable growth and for DG-EAC it means reforming cultural policy in accession states and facilitating transnational cooperation. However, since culture is a soft policy field, and applicant countries do not fall under the legal framework of the EU, the European Commission must steer without coercion and thus operate in a situation in which flexibility and rigidity alternate. While the European Commission offers the frameworks within which projects are developed, participating states remain responsible for the implementation of the projects. The Commission tries to deal with this by insisting on intergovernmental frameworks of cooperation, by adhering to funding criteria, and by insisting on European partnerships. These strategies have directly and indirectly changed local dealings with culture and thus brought about Europeanisation which has taken different forms and shapes.

These different manifestations of Europeanisation reflect a similar trend, namely that engaging in EU funded initiatives for accession states in Southeast Europe means modernizing the cultural sector. By means of new forms of multi-level governance the Commission 'governs at a distance' and asks local representatives to carry out structural reforms in the field of culture while these are obstructed by local circumstances. By means of funding criteria the Commission introduces a soft form of conditionality which has led to the development of projects predicated on Western European models. Finally, by means of the European partnerships, accession states are offered with the opportunity to learn from other European countries, but do not yet have the capacity to lead these projects.

Europeanisation through EU investments in culture thus means catching up with the rest of Europe while still acting from the position of the semi-periphery. The effects of these attempts to modernise the cultural sector are limited, but not unproductive. On the one hand, structural change fails to happen due to the mismatch between the European and local conditions and a lack of local knowledge

by the Commission. On the other hand, the EU has intensified the regulatory and technical interconnections between applicant and member states. Diverse actors involved in the EU funded cultural initiatives are governed through these approaches and engage in this process of discursive or cognitive Europeanisation (Lendvai 2007, 26). Additionally, local pioneers in the field of culture use EU partnerships to learn about new approaches, to find solutions to local problems and to find resources that are limited in their own countries. As such they manage to seize opportunities that are not available within their own country. By doing so they change their cultural sectors in a bottom-up manner.

Notes

1. i.e. provisions with respect to copyright protection, tax systems, and the liberalisation of marketplaces. Additionally, there have been some Court of Justice hearings which had consequences for 'culture' regarding state subsidiary or fixed book pricing regulations.
2. These negotiations concerned power relations within Europe (UK), the agricultural and fishery sections (DK, IR) and the financial contribution to the Community (UK).
3. As stated in paragraph 4: 'The Community shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of this Treaty, in particular in order to respect and to promote the diversity of its cultures' (Commission of the European Communities 1992).
4. Other Directorates General also invest in culture in accession states, but only when investments cross the border with non-members, for example in fields such as agriculture, climate, or tourism, or concerning copyrights issues.
5. At first it only included Poland and Hungary. Gradually it included the other applicant states: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and countries from the Western Balkans.
6. See: http://www.seecorridors.eu/?w_p=82&w_l=2, last accessed 12 November 2016.
7. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
8. Interview with civil servant at DG-NEAR, Brussels, April 2015.
9. Non-EU countries must pay an entry ticket to participate in the program. The cost is based on the size of their Gross Domestic Product in relation to the budget of the program (European Parliament and the Council 2013a, 227).
10. Interview with civil servant at DG-NEAR, Brussels, April 2015.
11. The SIF consist of five separate funds: the European Agricultural fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).
12. See: <http://www.interregeurope.eu/projects/>, last accessed October 2016.
13. These programs aimed to help the countries in the region in the transition of their cultural and heritage policies after the conflicts.
14. For more details about these projects see: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/projects/>, last accessed February 2016.
15. See: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/results_compendia/results_en.php, last accessed January 2016.
16. See: http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/opportunities/index_en.htm, last accessed January 2016.
17. Interview with Director of Creative Europe programme, Brussels April 2015.
18. Interview with Director of Creative Europe programme, Brussels April 2015.
19. Interview with policy analyst at DG-REGIO, Brussels May 2015.
20. Interview with a civil servant at DG-NEAR, Brussels May 2015.
21. For more information on the most recent Work Plan: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XG1223%2802%29&from=EN>, last accessed October 2016.
22. Interview with civil servant at DG-NEAR, Brussels, April 2014.
23. For an overview of the yearly calls see: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/funding_en, last accessed: February 2016.
24. Interview with Head of Unit Creative Europe, EACEA, Brussels, May 2015.
25. Interview with civil servant at DG-EAC, Brussels April 2016.
26. See: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/ipa/cross-border/, last accessed October 2016.
27. Interview with Director of Creative Europe Programme, Brussels, April 2016.
28. For an indication see the statistics available at the EACEA website: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/culture/results_compendia/results_en.php, last accessed August 2016.
29. Interview representative at SEIO, July 2016, Belgrade.
30. Interview with civil servant at DG-NEAR, Brussels, April 2015.
31. Interview with representative at SEIO, July 2016, Belgrade.
32. Interview with representative at SEIO, July 2016, Belgrade.

33. Generally, the Commission provides 50% of the funding, 30% needs to be provided by the national government and 20% has to come from other sources. In case the government cannot provide this funding other sources have to be found.
34. Interview with the Director of the Kolarac Foundation, Belgrade July 2016.
35. Interviews with a project manager at the Museum of Yugoslav History, the director of the Kolarac Foundation, the manager of Station Service for Contemporary Dance, an employee of the Center for the Promotion of Science, and a CEO of the Belgrade Design Week, Belgrade July 2016.
36. ENARC: European Network on Archival Cooperation. Interview with an employee of the Serbian Academy of Sciences, Belgrade July 2016.
37. Interview with CEO of the Belgrade Design Week, Belgrade July 2016.
38. Interview with Director of the Creative Europe Program, DG-EAC, Brussels April 2015.

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