

## Soft Power – Diplomacy and Identity

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### Abstract

This paper aims to describe the relationship between diplomacy and identity. Can we still talk about soft power in the terms of Joseph Nye? Does Europe use soft power? And if so, does it use it regarding the term of ‘collective identity’? Starting from the article of Anthony D. Smith, *National identity and the idea of European unity*, can we talk about collective cultural identity? Europe is a continent that knows and accepts lots of different cultures but does it aim, in terms of definition, to have a single „European culture”? There are lots of questions raised by this article. If the members of UE are searching to have a collective identity, how are the member states reacting to this idea? Eventually, every single country is not going to give up the national culture and what is defining each other. There is a common destiny that combines continuity and memory. We can find this at every social level and also regarding the national diplomacy. Attracting the UE members into having a European culture, and doing this in terms of soft power, can this really work for the UE? The European identity, as well as the national identity, it is not a natural one but a social one. It is a social construct seen as the result of historical conditions and cultural relations.

**Keywords:** identity, Europe, soft-power, cosmopolitanism, diplomacy

### **A brief introduction into diplomacy**

World War II changed for the most part the political, economic, social, and cultural factors which are influencing the everyday life of all humans. Although important European states have suffered major economic and social losses, Europe succeeded to have a continuous and lasting development for 50 years. Different factors, such as the cultural ones, exist with this new alignment stage of the European countries, helping for a better accomplishment of the bilateral and multilateral relations. The way through which important bilateral relations are achieved implies diplomacy as well. The advantage of diplomacy is that it does not necessarily seek an economic interest. It mainly uses a modelling force for revealing the importance of good relations with other states, either European or non-European.

Successful cultural festivals may be considered part of the bilateral and multilateral relations' triumph, together with worldwide museums or material and immaterial heritage. This is very interesting because, at first, we do not consider art as a political message or politics as a manifest for art and culture. And yet they intertwine through certain directions.

Once World War II has ended, the democratisation of culture<sup>1</sup> took place at the same time with the democratisation of states. Through the means of the European Union, but also in America or other continents, art becomes free, it begins to express on its own, its messages being sometimes even political. We recall the massive loss of artworks stolen by the Nazis during the war, which produced a great prejudice for the entire culture (Edsel, 2009). Masterpieces of great value for the entire European culture were looted. At one point, art, politics and diplomacy tend to intertwine and follow the same path, displaying the same message.

### **Identity and International Relationships**

After the Revolution of 1989, when the socialist regime collapsed in the majority of the states under Soviet protectorate, nationalism benefited of a

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'democratisation of culture' defines the totality of rights self-attributed to culture after the end of World War II, as a vital communication instrument which kept alive the international relations. Just like a democratic state, culture is free to develop its activity domain as well.

media momentum with very strong echoes in society. National and European identity are the most discussed subjects. Throughout its existence, society witnessed different types of people which promoted their identity on either national or international level. What unites the people is a common national conscience. This should be practically a form of human solidarity. There are several types of both intrinsic and extrinsic human solidarities, such as: the family solidarity, the community solidarity, the confessional solidarity, and finally the national solidarity. The issue of identity is inscribed in a context determined by economic, social and political factors. At the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the elites played an essential role in defining the national identity. They are still paying this role nowadays.

Anthony D. Smith argues that the idea of identity dates back to the Roman Empire. The identity of people appears when certain interests cannot be overlooked. "Collective cultural identity", as named by Smith, means to believe in a common destiny. This common destiny is composed of continuity and memory. "Collective cultural identity" is traceable at all social levels but it cannot exist without the members of the community. They should also agree to share its memories to the others being a part of it (Smith, 1992: 56).

But starting with urbanisation, the communication routs of a society are developing, for example "the language and any other number of auxiliary codes, such as alphabets or writing, printing and computing systems" (Murgescu, 2000:138). This fact will help identity to be defined also by this aspect. Individual identity, or much better said personal (because it exists at an extrinsic level as well), depends on situation, the latter oscillating from what is dictated by society, respectively nationality, to what you have been taught and educated. The problem of individual identity is that it is not as persuasive or persistent as the collective one. Collective identity finds its place especially in the spiritual framework – religion. European identity gains more ground compared to the national identity. This is a proven fact because, in addition to the citizenship of each member state, once joining the European Union we receive a second citizenship – the European one. Although from a cultural perspective the European Union encourages any authentic and original form of ritual, celebration, craft, or even gastronomy, the national

identity is lost and blends with the European one. The individual in the society is not interested anymore in preserving what he already possesses, thus the interest shifts on future, development, not on stagnation. It is difficult to construct an identity but it is much harder to maintain it alive, due to the fact that not only the cultural/social/political elite has to support this effort but also the common people within their collectivities: from family to community, city, county, etc.

Our preferences are direct proportional with the identity of each of us because, even if it is called national or European identity as we could notice, the man lives in a society in which a series of *patterns* are developed. Identity is a social cultural construct which varies and is in a continuous change. For instance, if in the last 200 years a man of colour was permanently stigmatised due to the racial stereotype, nowadays these things remain in the dark memory of a country, the USA, which recently had a president of colour. Things are in a permanent transformation, and our goals and aspirations are changing in regards to the society we live in. European cultural identity is an *a priori* concept which helps the states and the entire European community to gain a larger worldwide resonance. When a country is identified as a European state, the international resonance increases.

European identity, just like the national one, “is not provided by nature but it is socially constructed as the result of certain determinant historical conditions and cultural relationships” (Stiftung, 2000:19). It should be understood that this concept of European identity did not exist at the time we had joined the European Union. It is rather a process of understanding and accepting the fact that we are no longer alone and that an entire European community exists. It is formed by different states, following a series of common political, economic and cultural principles. This would be in the advantage of each state if it would choose to benefit of all the available resources.

In this case, when talking about the European cultural identity, we are thinking of all the values, beliefs, and customs which are common to all the communities within the European Union. These values may and are highlighted through an artwork<sup>2</sup> or a cinematographic or musical work.

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<sup>2</sup> By artwork we understand the totality of paintings, sculptures, writings, buildings, museums, archaeological sites, architectural and/or historical assemblages, etc.

Anthony D. Smith argues that cultural legacy is what actually helped us to define what it means to be European. History offers us the following examples: Roman law, parliamentarism, nationalism, Renaissance, empiricism, etc. All these elements help us to understand our identity not just as “united in diversity” (the official motto of the EU) but as a family of cultures created from a syndrome of partial or total sharing of traditions (Smith, 1992:70).

Diplomacy and European identity should be thought of in regards to these cultural patterns. When discussing diplomacy, we do not relate to the states’ foreign affairs. Olivia Todorean, in the chapter “Diplomația” (Biró, 2013:59), talks about the mistake frequently found in the book of Henry Kissinger – *Diplomacy*. The latter actually focuses on the foreign affairs of the United States of America, not on diplomacy as science or art (depending on how we see things). The difference between diplomacy and external politics of each state is that foreign affairs refer exactly to the notions it denominates: targeting the cross-border public politics of a state. On the other hand, diplomacy follows the inter-state relations created by the states themselves.

In order to answer the question regarding the existence of soft power in the European space, Joseph Nye opened the discussion since the beginning of the 1990s (especially the first two) in his book *Bound to lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. We will not get into the details of this dimension of diplomacy (Nye, 2009:17), yet it is necessary for the purpose of this paper to establish a series of terms. Therefore, regarding the soft dimension of diplomacy, we are interested in the concept of “soft power” which “is based on the ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye, 2009:22) through attractivity. Attractivity dates since the beginnings of diplomacy, attested in the times of Ancient Greece. It is an extremely interesting dimension in this book due to the fact that the write offers another chance, another variant for imposing power. But not of military or economic nature as one might expect, because success will be limited or it will not last.

An eloquent example can be found in the countries ruled by a dictatorial regime, including Romania. When a state enjoys certain values and a certain identity which can be presented to the general public, the relations with the other states start to develop and prosper. This is why the identity we were

discussing in the previous subchapter is so important. Because through the means of identity one can approach the others much easily. Identity offers not only something of interest but also something of value.

The direction followed by a soft diplomacy is definitely the idea of convincing, not imposing. From a pragmatic point of view, in the field of international relations, the fact that the preferences of certain states are the same or at least similar helps very much in the decisional plan, because a state tends to follow another state with comparable values. Consequently, soft diplomacy is that part of diplomacy which uses attractivity, motivation and common values. It is a wide spread practice in the European space but elsewhere as well. It can be accomplished in the social, cultural, economic, or even the educational field. Practically, in this domain culture and education “follow the exchange of products between different national cultures” (Morgenthau, 2007, p. 535). Therefore, attractivity and motivation are important in this case also due to the fact that they represent the chance of a state to be recognised on international level.

Nye identified three sources of soft power: culture, political values and foreign politics (Nye, 2012, p. 103). Each of them has the capacity to generate a form of closeness to others. The author states that some aspects of human culture are universal. This is proven by the multitude of cultural valences which we find in the European space. For example, the common values of justice, equality, correctitude, being found in several types of cultures. It is not surprising that China’s soft power has increased in recent times, demonstrating internationally the credibility of the respective state.

The importance of understanding the material and immaterial cultural heritage is major in this case. Unfortunately, it is often ignored and less discussed. We recalled heritage because it is “an exercise of intellectual, aesthetic and civic mobilisation” (Ivănescu, 2009, p. 7). This means that the idea of heritage is actually an exercise which should address to people in order to understand, appreciate and respect everything which may be considered as heritage.

This “exercise of intellectual, aesthetic and civic mobilisation” can be transposed in ongoing cultural programmes. In this matter, European Cultural

Capital, it is an opportunity for Romania to develop bilateral relations and to accomplish diplomacy at the highest level. It is useful to mention that in 2007, during the meetings of the commission, the European Union's intervention area concerning culture has been defined through the first document which shapes the cultural and political objectives: Agenda for Culture (RPE, 2008). The new European position emerged as a consequence of the necessity to take into account the determinant realities of the globalisation process.

These realities can be divided in two categories: positive (*e.g.*, an easier circulation of the work and of the artist) and negative (the Popcorn Culture). The European Council performed an evaluation of the cultural politics of the member states. Four large objectives resulted: promoting cultural identity (identity determines us to sense in a more profound way that we pertain to a group or community; in addition, it is about a European identity, common to all the member states and which develops throughout the integration process), promoting cultural diversity (gaining knowledge on the other's culture reveals the respect for it), promoting creativity (it enriches culture and inspires towards new forms of artistic manifestations), promoting participation (it enables each citizen to equally take part at the cultural life).

All these objectives can be achieved through cultural programmes such as TM023. If we relate to collective identity, we should highlight the fact that cultural programs represent a fair example of cultural closeness, of identitarian construction. Furthermore, they are represented and performed by political and apolitical actors who have the responsibility to follow the most original form of culture. In other words, the programme 'European Cultural Capital' aims the implication of EU in the process of cultural politics. Nevertheless, the state retains the possibility to manage at will this cultural politics.

## **Conclusion**

We consider that the starting premise is the fact that heritage is part of the modernisation process because in this way one can appreciate what is old by means of the new. The diplomacy of a state is deeply rooted in reality and the reality of certain countries like Romania is that they do not afford the

luxury to miss such a project. Regardless if it is known or not at European level, Romania can develop relationships, create agreements, understand the starting premises and maintain the identity of a state through soft power. The method employed for becoming you own example by performing different exercises is the reason for which such projects contribute to the European identity. Besides better relationships with other states, this aspect may result in the applanation of the difference between the national and European identity.

Finally, the European project became over the course of time a constant preoccupation of the European national states, growing into a desideratum for other countries.

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