

East European Reflection Group (EE RG)

Cultural Actors of Change in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova

AN OUTLINE

The ECF and GMF

The independent European Cultural Foundation (ECF) is committed to the promotion of cultural cooperation and the notion of ‘the wider Europe’. However, we do not have much knowledge of and experience in working with the countries of Eastern Europe (EE)ⁱ. Through the launch of a reflection (and advocacy) process in 2007 on cooperation in and with the Eastern neighbourhood, we strive for a much clearer understanding of the issues at stake, cultural-political conditions in place and possibilities of change. Building on the results of the “Enlargement of Minds” seminar *Moving borders - The EU and its New Neighbours* (October 2003), **the East European Reflection Group (EERG) will focus on the intersection between policy and culture and explore how the arts and culture can trigger political changes.**

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) is a strong grant-making and network organisation that supports, among others, initiatives to strengthen civil society and democracies. Dedicated to promoting cooperation and understanding with a long track record in Central Europe and the Eastern European Neighbourhoodⁱⁱ, GMF could constitute an ideal partner in examining ways in which cultural actors can and do address political changes and contribute to societal and cultural development. GMF maintains an important presence on both sides of the Atlantic. Its headquarters are in Washington DC, and it has established seven offices in Europe: Berlin, Bratislava, Bucharest, Paris, Brussels, Belgrade, and Ankara.

The context

Public opinion in the vast majority of the EU member states does not care about Eastern Europe. With three (important) exceptions: Energy policies (e.g. the German Gasprom deal; the gas price battle between Ukraine and Russia); ‘Enlargement fatigue’ and migration issues (No further enlargement, please!, accompanied by a strong border regime); and occasional enthusiasm in democratic movements (like the ‘orange revolution’).

Public interest in a comprehensive EU Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)ⁱⁱⁱ is very limited and much dominated by national interests, rooted in specific historical and geopolitical realities. This is mirrored in remarkably strong bilateral links of a few EU countries to EU Neighbourhood countries, like in the Northeast Finland-Russia, and in the East Poland-Ukraine. Private third-sector investment of Europeans is scarce, American foundations are much more present.

The European Union, trapped by geopolitical interests of individual countries, has until now been unable to develop a comprehensive European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It lacks a clear political and strategic vision, instruments, resources, and inter-DG cooperation.

It certainly is ambitious to think of a strong cultural neighbourhood strategy but with the EE RG it is hoped to bring the region closer to the hearts and minds of EU citizens, and to provide arguments and evidence how the arts and culture can achieve societal change, foster democracy, challenge mentalities.

Therefore, we need to gather local cultural actors of change for helping us in assessing realities and processes as the prime condition for discussing and developing proper cultural action, let alone new cultural instruments. In order to avoid being deeply 'lost in translations' we need to ask questions and try to give some answers; for example what "neighbourhood" really means and promises in the EU context.

Neighbourhood usually refers to people next-door, people we know, or could easily get to know. It implies the possibility for direct, face-to-face communication, in all aspects, from intimacy to confrontation. However, the EU's Neighbourhood is an abstract term, empty of any substance. Can interest, curiosity, solidarity be raised, or emerge for the 'EU neighbourhood' besides the more specific 'neighbourhoods'? And if such interest, curiosity, solidarity were needed, how to facilitate it?

The guiding principles

► **Contextualisation:** although we often refer to the Eastern European Neighbourhood, it is vital to differentiate the national and local conditions in which the reflection process is taking place. Countries of the region in focus face very different challenges and are differently accessible. The EE RG will have to deal thoughtfully with the individual situations and adopt a tailored, case-by-case approach.

► **Reflection-Action-Advocacy:** As for previous reflection groups, the EE RG will combine a reflective phase, an action-oriented phase and an advocacy phase (overlapping to some extent). The exact content and shape regarding actions and advocacy will entirely depend on the outcomes of the reflection process but will address both EU countries and the countries in focus.

► **Reflection group members:** The EE RG will gather outstanding individuals from the region, but not necessarily exclusively from the arts and culture. Cultural actors, in a larger sense, are our target group who are able to initiate positive processes of change through the arts and culture. They will be selected on the basis of their individual quality and not representing any country or public authority.

► **Result-driven approach:** Seen the complexity of the region, the EE RG will adopt a step-by-step approach (achievable goal setting is important) however delivering tangible results, including new means and instruments in support of cross-border and trans-national cultural cooperation in and with Eastern Europe. Several tools can be imagined (e.g. capacity-building or mobility programme, placement scheme, summer school, EE Fund, scholarships, etc.) but the concrete outputs should be decided upon only after assessment and discussion of the concrete local needs and aspirations of local actors of change.

► **Partnerships:** The EE RG will seek cooperation with other foundations and organisations that have working experience in the region as to enhance coherence, complementarity and effectiveness of the initiative^{iv}. It will also connect to artistic events in western European countries with the aim to increase knowledge and interest in the artistic and cultural scenes of the Eastern European neighbourhood, eg. Festival d'Avignon 2008, Lille 3000 with focus on EE and Istanbul in 2009.

► **Impact:** The networks of both the ECF and GMF will be mobilised to engage with the EE RG in different ways. It is also intended to piggy-back on already existing initiatives, e.g. EPC policy briefings, EFC's annual conference and assembly, ECF and GMF Brussels events so as to bring in players from the region, open up debate, and raise the public awareness of the region in focus

The target areas

The three countries between the EU and Russia: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus.^v

The Activities

1. **Mapping of cultural actors of change** in the three target countries: Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus. In contrary to previous mappings focusing on the independent cultural scene, this exercise aims to go beyond the usual circles of "ECF clientele". We aim at identifying outstanding individuals who combine intellectual strength and practical activity to the benefit of positive change within the arts and culture fields, but also could impact other areas of society. It means exploring individuals but also the ways through which they created or significantly contributed to change. The mappings will also highlight the main features of the cultural policy systems in place in the three respective countries with care not to duplicate already existing formation (e.g. Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends with entries for Ukraine and Moldova).
Timing: Mappings commissioned in April to be delivered by the end of June 2007, and to be individually discussed in the three brainstorming sessions. Final country reports expected in September 2007.
2. **Three country-based brainstorming sessions** with actors of change (approx. 10 people, including EE RG facilitator and general rapporteur) in Kiev (meeting with selected correspondents from Belarus and Ukraine), and in Chisinau (meeting with selected correspondents from Moldova).
Timing: June, July
3. **Strategic workshop for development of a 3-year plan:** Based on discussion of the results of the mapping exercises and brainstorming sessions, development of a 3-year action plan, together with invited cultural actors of change from the three countries. Workshop facilitated by policy expert Pavol Demes, possibly with the participation to parts of the entire workshop of potential partners.
Timing: 19-20 September 2007 (19 Sept. regional meeting and 20 September meeting with strategic partners and funders) in Trakai, Lithuania.
4. **Artistic/cultural project** (eg. contemporary/electronic music from the East, festival organised in cooperation with partners
Timing: 2009, in the Netherlands
5. **Publication:** on-line and possibly also in print
Timing: 2009
6. **NEW cultural instrument** with focus Eastern Europe through alliance of partners

The work process

1. phase focuses on our immediate neighbours to the East (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine), including consultation of potential partners and fact-finding mission. Cultural actors of change (outstanding artists and cultural practitioners, journalists, cultural activists) define concrete thematic issues to be explored through the RG process, guided by a policy expert and within the overall framework set up by the ECF (Balkan RG model). The policy recommendations will be based on the findings of the RG members and thus formulated by experts from the region. Advocacy for the implementation of the recommendation will be shared between all partners (East and West).

2. phase broadens the reflection through satellite consultations in Russia and the Caucasus. The aim is to better comprehend Russia's understanding of cultural cooperation with the region in focus and the Caucasus, and to discuss possible complementary measures between Western and Russian partners

3. phase shares the results of the EE RG process with a larger circle of stakeholders, including Eastern European countries, Russia and EU countries with special interest in the region (Baltic countries, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic), as well as the EU - a multi-stakeholder advocacy event, possibly to be related to the ECF's artistic/cultural diversity event of 2009.

The expected results

The reflection group process will:

- Contribute to the ECF's diversity focus through supporting cultural actors of change in Eastern Europe (integration) and exploring the contribution of the EE's Diaspora to multiple European citizenship (migration)
- Facilitate networking and partnership building between individuals and organisations of the region, and of countries from the target region with EU countries
- Trigger curiosity and Introduce the EE region on the mental map of cultural operators and artists from the west
- Devise policy orientations as regards the place of cultural cooperation in the European Neighbourhood Policy
- Result in a publication (on-line, and possibly off-line) and public event in the Netherlands
- Launch a concrete cooperation instrument tailored according to the needs analysed in the course of the EE RG process

Amsterdam, 25 April 2007

ⁱ EE covers in the context Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova.

ⁱⁱ GMF runs three trusts for the larger EE region (Trust for Civil Society, Balkan Trust for Democracy, Black Sea Trust), as well as the Fund for Belarus.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Caucasus seems to be off the map completely, in terms of European concerns and debates, among a large public.

^{iv} Of particular relevance in this context is the recently launched Council of Europe "The Kyiv Initiative Regional Programme" focusing on artistic creation and cooperation projects between the countries of Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Moldova.

^v Some limited expansion through satellite meetings in Russia and the Southern Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan).