



Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Erato Kozakou-Marcoullis, on "Cultural Diplomacy: Foreign Policy and Intercultural Dialogue Tool" at the Inaugural Conference of the Cyprus Center for Intercultural Studies entitled "Intercultural Dialogue and Cultural Diplomacy in Practice", Nicosia - 15/01/2013

Dear friends,

Let me first express my gratitude to the Cyprus Center for Intercultural Studies for inviting me to be one of the main speakers at its Inaugural Conference on Intercultural Dialogue and Cultural Diplomacy. This Conference is the first of its kind in Cyprus. I share the organizers' view that using cultural diplomacy as a tool in politics has not been thoroughly examined in the academic community of Cyprus. Thus, I believe that this Conference will duly contribute to this end.

Almost three decades in active diplomacy and two terms in Office as Minister of Foreign Affairs of my country have taught me how important and effective tool is culture in the promotion and projection of the interests of your country, as well as in the effort to positively influence foreign governments and peoples. Throughout my career, the history and culture of Cyprus have always been the guiding light and the valuable tool in the implementation of our foreign policy objectives.

In order not to create confusion, let us first see what the meaning of diplomacy and cultural diplomacy is.

Diplomacy is the art or science of handling foreign policy, that is the whole of actions which constitute the relation of one state with the other members of the international community, i.e. the governments and the international and regional intergovernmental organizations, but also other organized groups of individuals or institutions in a foreign country, for example political parties, academic institutions, mass media, think tanks etc.

One of the most comprehensive definitions of cultural diplomacy has been offered by the American scholar Dr Milton Cummings, who argued that it is nothing less than the "exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs and other aspects of culture with the intention of fostering mutual understanding". It is also a tool or means of projecting or improving the image of a country abroad or strengthening relations with other countries and peoples.

Indeed, promoting mutual understanding in today's globalised and increasingly interdependent world is crucial. In the present post-Cold War era, notions such as international human rights, conflict resolution and cultural diversity are steadily gaining ground. Cultural diplomacy, which entails the interchange of ideas and cultures through dialogue and mutual respect, is an integral part of this process.

Relative to the notion of cultural diplomacy is the meaning of "soft power" which was first used in the 1980's, primarily in the United States, to indicate the ability of a state to convince, to attract attention and to influence other international protagonists through culture, values, ideas and policies that it pursues. On the other hand, "hard power" is the ability to coerce, deriving from military or economic strength, a power that has been implemented relentlessly throughout the ages.

Though cultural diplomacy has deep roots in history, its different forms have gained tremendous significance in our times as a means of peacefully and constructively cooperating and exchanging views and ideas in international relations, as well as of strengthening relations between countries, peoples and cultures.

Cyprus' ten thousand years of history is a case in point of merging civilizations and interculturalism. Due to its strategic geographic position, located between three continents in a volatile region, Cyprus applies a cautious foreign policy based on the principles of peace and mutual understanding. A member of the EU

with good relations, both with Israel and the Arab world, Cyprus is an element of stability in the region. Constituting a pole of attraction for historians and archaeologists from around the world, Cyprus has always cherished a significant advantage in issues of culture and civilization, disproportionate to its size. This advantage, this very important tool we have used and we should use more effectively in the conduct of our foreign policy and more generally in our efforts to project and improve the image of our country abroad.

In our practice of regional and international relations, Cyprus has been a sturdy proponent of soft power politics, which require persuasion through culture and ideas. Thus, we consider cultural diplomacy as a significant element of soft power; and as important as political and economic diplomacy.

Our participation in the EU, which is a major proponent of soft power policies in the international arena, provides us the opportunity to play an important role in this regard. I will mention just one example of the EU's immense soft power capabilities; the enlargement process.

Enlargement is a major tool in promoting peace and stability in the European continent through a peaceful process of democratization and modernization. During the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU we placed the enlargement agenda high on our list of priorities, aiming to further advance the process on all enlargement-related dossiers on the basis of the "own merits" approach and strict conditionality. We believe that the results we achieved were quite impressive.

The December General Affairs Council, which I had the opportunity to chair, reaffirmed the EU's commitment to the enlargement process as one of the most efficient means for reinforcing peace, democracy and stability in Europe. During the Cyprus Presidency I visited all candidates and potential candidates of the Western Balkans and Iceland in order to send a strong message of support and encouragement for a swift process of reforms. The Cyprus Presidency managed to progress further the work on the accession of Iceland and Montenegro, while the relevant Council conclusions reaffirmed the EU's commitment to the European perspective for the Western Balkans, considering it essential for the reconciliation and future of the region.

The EU is a unique project of peace, compromise and understanding. In this context, the Nobel Peace Prize 2012 was awarded to the European Union because "for over six decades it contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe". The enlargement process is specifically mentioned in the Nobel Committee's decision for the award as such a project. Cultural understanding, peaceful coexistence and respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law constitute, therefore, the necessary code of conduct for any country that aspires to become a part of this project.

This is why the EU has remained critical of Turkey's militaristic approach towards Cyprus. Contrary to the European notion of soft power politics, Turkey still opts for a "hard power" stance towards Cyprus; an anachronistic approach that uses conquest and coercion through military might. Ankara has to realize that gunboat diplomacy, with the display of military power and direct threats of warfare, has no place in the European Union. It was therefore no surprise that the December Council expressed its deep regret for Turkey's stance towards the Cypriot rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU and noted, for one more time with growing concern, the lack of substantial progress by Turkey towards fully meeting the political criteria for accession.

We really hope that Turkey will change its negative stance towards Cyprus and constructively contribute to a settlement of the Cyprus issue based on the reunification of the island and its people, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. We will spare no effort to make reunification a reality, because we strongly believe in the peaceful coexistence between the communities of Cyprus, irrespective of ethnic background, language or religion, living together in a reunified country where freedom, democracy, respect of diversity and promotion of multicultural harmony will prevail, along with prosperity, peace and progress. This is why I strongly feel that we should do more in the direction of cooperation between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the area of culture and the arts. Certain efforts exerted so far in the fields of literature, music and the visual arts have been very successful and have kept the hope alive for a common future in our common homeland.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When discussing cultural diplomacy it is important to acknowledge that culture is very much at the center of what constitutes identity. We have been blessed in Cyprus with a land that is rich in culture, a culture that has its roots deep in history, and a culture and heritage which we, Cypriots, are extremely proud of. It is

also a culture and a heritage which must be protected – for the generations to come and for the good of mankind.

As such, I would like to point out two examples where the Republic of Cyprus has gone to great lengths, and continues to work with the same passion, towards the preservation and the proud promotion of Cypriot culture.

The first example is the legal campaign which we waged to repatriate looted cultural artifacts from Cyprus. It was a campaign which was won against all odds, an effort which set new standards for the repatriation of national treasures, and proof that even a small country can achieve significant legal and diplomatic victories.

As many of you know, four mosaics of Panagia Kanakaria of Lythrangomi were returned to Cyprus in 1991, after a landmark judgment in the United States. Early last year, frescoes from the Church of Saint Euphemianos of Lysi were finally repatriated to Cyprus after efforts which lasted nearly 20 years and involved the conscientious efforts of hundreds of people, internationally.

The other example is the restoration of the Hala Sultan Tekke, near Larnaka. This important Muslim pilgrimage site features prominently in many programs of visits by Muslim dignitaries. It is a significant shrine of Muslim heritage and history in Cyprus, and it is one which all Cypriots must be proud of.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU also attributed great importance to cultural diplomacy. More specifically, the Cyprus Presidency, during the last six months, gave the floor to various institutions and foundations to organize more than 140 meetings and conferences under its auspices, not only in Cyprus but all over the world, in an effort for the private sector and the civil society to engage more closely with the Presidency. Moreover, the Presidency offered to thousands of people the opportunity to enjoy and become acquainted with Cypriot culture and civilization through at least 350 cultural events organized in Cyprus and all around the globe by utilizing all our diplomatic missions abroad.

From the beginning we made it clear that cultural diplomacy would play an essential role in our Presidency, considering culture in each Member State as a fundamental element for the formulation of European identity. Cyprus, as the eastern bastion of European culture and historically a melting pot of various civilizations, presented its rich civilization through these cultural events. I will just name a few cultural events, which are indicative of the island's rich culture and of the importance we gave to cultural diplomacy during our Presidency:

- Exhibition “Aphrodite, Goddess of the Mediterranean”, at the Palazzo del Quirinale in Rome,
- Exhibition on “Medieval Cyprus”, at the Louvre Museum in Paris,
- Mapping Cyprus 1191 – 2012: Crusaders, Traders and Explorers, Centre for Fine Arts (“Bozar”), Brussels and
- Exhibition on “Culture in Dialogue: Cyprus in the Ancient Mediterranean”, at the Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire in Brussels.

The first Cyprus Presidency aimed to work towards a “Better Europe”, a Europe more relevant to its citizens and in the world. We believe that we realized this goal not only by achieving progress in the work within the Council and facilitating inter-institutional cooperation, but also by being quite active on cultural diplomacy.

I have to stress that by engaging, during the last six months, all our Embassies in this unique cultural project, we experienced first-hand the immense importance of cultural diplomacy. Culture is the means to turn a country's Embassies into partners of civil society, not only as partners of governments. In this regard, I share the view of Heinrich Reimann who, in his thorough editorial on “The Importance and Essence of Foreign Cultural Policy of States”, argued that “foreign cultural policy is in itself vital for establishing long-lasting and deep relations between countries in international intercourse”.

Indeed, cultural diplomacy as a means of soft power policies is a prevailing tool for mutual understanding and peace. I can assure you that the end of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU will not be the end of our efforts in promoting cultural diplomacy. By learning from this great experience, we will enhance

our endeavours in this regard.

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