

The Eastern Partnership Cultural Observatory was set up with the aim to provide an overview on culture in the EaP Region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), bringing together evidence-based materials and identifying priorities for research and new policy initiatives. Its first thematic briefs have been displayed on the Observatory [webpage](#), part of Culture and Creativity EU Programme [portal](#), administered by the British Council after the end of the programme.

BRIEF#2: TOP PRIORITIES IN THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICIES (2012-2017)

Identifying top cultural policy priorities

In principle this is an easy task. One has to go through government programmes, the annual budgets and various declarations of the minister in charge of culture. In reality, the observer is usually embarrassed by the great variety of policy goals that any government pursues in the field of culture. Some of these goals are too general to link them to concrete measures. The expert team of the Eastern Partnership Observatory experienced this challenge when they decided to identify the top cultural policy priorities followed in the six countries in the past five years. A cross section examination based on documents, statistics and media communication – including the Eastern Partnership Culture & Partnership Programme [website](#) – has led to the following order of key priorities in the six countries, as perceived by our team (the darker the cell, the more prominent is the issue):

Cultural policy priority	AM	AZ	BY	GE	MD	UA
Preservation of built heritage	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark	Light
Continued elaboration of the legislative framework	Light	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark
Preservation and revival of intangible heritage	Dark	Light	Light	Dark	Dark	Light
Operations along strategic principles and devices	Light	Dark	Dark	Dark	Light	Light
Modernization of the institutional structure and activities	Light	Light	Light	Dark	Dark	Light
Exploiting cultural heritage for sake of national cohesion	Light	Dark	Dark	Light	Light	Dark
Seeking global recognition with cultural means	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light
Increasing attention on pragmatic features of culture	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Dark
Continued expansion by investing in new institutions	Light	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Dark
Focusing on patriotic morale with the help of culture	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light

The table is the product of the following procedure:

1. The most important policy goals and achievements were collected in the respective countries
2. These were sorted under common concepts, which applied across all countries: ten such policy priorities were identified
3. The order of priority of the ten goals was then established about each country, in two steps: first the national expert prepared her/his ranking,
4. which was then discussed at a joint workshop. The main function of the common discussion was to ensure that each policy goal was understood in the same way.

General conditions

Before going into detail, the general setting needs to be outlined. The vitality of culture in a country is the function of a variety of dynamics. Cultural policy priorities of the government are among the most important factors, especially in places where cultural life is predominantly dependent on public resources, which is the case in all six countries. This is different from a number of other European countries, where private forces (the resources spent on culture by cultural entrepreneurs, sponsors, private foundations and the public) as well as local governments play relatively greater roles. The political and economic difficulties, which in some cases amounted to serious crises in the six countries, have seriously affected the general conditions of culture. Ups and downs in the government budgets prevented from evenly rising continued cultural development across the area.

Priority No.1

❖ Preservation of built heritage

As a kind of greatest common denominator, the team found the care about the built heritage of the nation the strongest priority of the six countries. The ideological neglect by the authorities, as well as the economic misery, in the earlier decades, left the overwhelming majority of the physical cultural legacy in derisory condition. The protection, reconstruction and rehabilitation of the monuments is a never-ending long haul. These processes require huge amounts of resources that go beyond the means of any government. There are specific areas of this vast domain in every country, however, which received special attention in the past few years. As a peculiar burden besetting the region, governments feel concern about cultural heritage in occupied or seceding territories.

For illustrative examples and further analysis you are advised to Eastern Partnership Cultural Observatory Brief No.3 dedicated to cultural heritage.

Priority No.2

❖ Continued elaboration of the legislative framework

The machinery of legislation goes on regulating various aspects of culture, which remains an ongoing priority, as is the case in every country in Europe. The past few years produced, however, few ground-breaking parliamentary acts on culture in the six countries.

Illustrative examples:

- In Belarus a pioneering instrument, the Culture Code was adopted in July, 2016, and a presidential decree is under preparation about cinematography: funding and dissemination;
- In Moldova a law on libraries was passed in 2017. Earlier, the law on cinema was adopted and the clout on heritage and monument protection of the Penal Contravention Codes was strengthened;
- In Ukraine a law on state support to film production and the law on Ukrainian Cultural Fund were passed;
- In Azerbaijan the laws on state support for cinema, theatre and museums were adopted.

Priority No.3

❖ **Concentrating resources on the preservation and revival of intangible heritage of the nation**

The concept of intangible cultural heritage has had a relatively short career on the international arena. The relevant UNESCO Convention dates from 2003. The world lists of intangible cultural heritage offer countries on the periphery equal opportunities with those in the traditional power centres to highlight their cultural patrimony, and the brief records of statehood of the post-soviet countries present no handicap in this respect. The six states keep pace with these developments and devote considerable energies to identifying, preserving, highlighting and reviving intangible national cultural heritage – compensating also for the earlier suppression of spiritual and folkloric patrimony.

For illustrative examples and further analysis you are advised to Eastern Partnership Cultural Observatory Brief No.3 dedicated to cultural heritage.

Priority No.4

❖ **Operations along strategic principles and devices**

The early period of state building brought about the birth of the most important legislative acts with regard to culture. Work on parliamentary acts on various fields and issues of culture goes on (as pointed out above) but the emphasis has shifted towards policy devices that govern strategic processes. The character of middle or long term strategies tends to become more pragmatic and accountable than declarative. Cultural strategies are increasingly prepared with the involvement of a variety of stakeholders. Ideally, the same stakeholders take part in the monitoring of the progression of the strategies.

Illustrative examples:

- After a process that started in February 2015, the Georgian government approved a culture strategy in July 2016;
- Also in 2016, a national strategy for long term reform of culture development was adopted in Ukraine;
- Culture 2020 – the strategy of development in Moldova was adopted in 2013;
- Besides regulating the various domain of culture, the Culture Code of Belarus fulfils the function of a cultural strategy.

Priority No.5

❖ **Modernization of the institutional structure and activities**

Keeping pace with the requirements of our age, absorbing the essences of global trends in cultural policies, adopting practices from other countries, and addressing the burden of historic legacies continue to determine the cultural policy agenda in the six countries. Processes of modernization are taking place on a wide front. They include measures of legislation, acts of re-organisation, thrusts of financing, upgrading procedures etc.

Illustrative examples:

- The finance ministry of Moldova prepared detailed analytical comments to the budget estimates for 2015-2017, designating the diversification of services of state and private cultural institutions as a primary task;

- International standards are dutifully applied at creating new cultural institutions in Armenia;
- A process of functional review of the Ukrainian culture ministry was carried out, as well as a position for a creative industries specialist was created in the ministry;
- Transparent procedures for contractor selection for large cultural events were introduced in Ukraine.

Priority No.6

❖ **Exploiting the potential in highlighting and celebrating cultural heritage of the nation for sake of national cohesion**

The urgency of defining and reinforcing national identity is ironic in the light of national cultures that look back on long centuries. (Just to recall: two of the six countries, Armenia and Belarus are actually celebrating the 500th anniversary of printing in the national language.) Nevertheless, the recent establishment of modern independent statehood compels all six countries to focus on national identity and cohesion. Highlighting and celebrating cultural heritage is an obvious means to this avail. In this domain all six nations must compensate for the senseless and often ruthless neglect and oppression of the cultivation of national cultural heritage during the previous regime.

Recent instances that illustrate this cultural policy priority:

- Armenia dedicated year-long string of cultural events to celebrate two major historical events: the Genocide Centennial and the 500th anniversary of book-printing;
- The head of state opened the 16th edition of the *Unity Through Diversity* ethnic festival in 2017 in Moldova;
- In Belarus, 2016 was declared a *Year of Culture*, with the main aim of celebrating the jubilees of great Belarusian personalities;
- Also In 2016, concentrated initiatives were devised with the aim to raise the awareness of the Ukrainian cultural and historical symbols (*Anne de Kiev Fest*, 70th Anniversary of the deportation of Crimean Tatars, Maidan Museum initiative, *Vyshyvanka* – Ukrainian Embroidered Shirt Day etc.).

Priority No.7

❖ **Seeking global recognition and visibility with cultural means**

Despite national cultural traditions rooting back many centuries, the six countries share the compelling need and desire to make their cultures better known and seen on the international arena due to the short record of independent statehood. Beyond this common interest, however, actual aims and measures demonstrate a broad scale within the six countries.

For illustrative examples and further analysis you are advised to Eastern Partnership Cultural Observatory Brief#1 dedicated to cultural diplomacy.

Priority No.8

❖ **Increasing attention on pragmatic features of culture besides the symbolic domains**

Some of the aforementioned priorities identified for the six countries exploit the symbolic power that culture can lend to the national communities. While they continue to be the leading tone, a number of practical cultural policy devices have been coming to the fore. These policy instruments aim to unleash the potential of culture for the development of the economy. The cultural industries and market receive increasing attention and the concept of the creative sector is gaining momentum.

Illustrative examples:

- In Ukraine the importance of boosting national cultural products has grown (eg. cinema, music, books) – which was confirmed by the regulatory acts and partially by the budget expenses. Among others, a programme named *Ukrainian Book* was launched impacting the book sector, and protective measures are being taken about Russian cultural products on the Ukrainian market;
- In Georgia, the cultural and creative industries received limelight by establishing an organization called *Creative Georgia* in 2017, aiming to mobilize resources to those branches;
- In Azerbaijan the promotion of several genres (e.g. ethno-jazz and *mugham*, classical music or folkloric and gastronomic traditions) is geared to cultural tourism;
- In Belarus a state programme was initiated on the production and popularisation of *slutsk belts*, the traditional detail of men's clothes in 2012-2015;
- The digitalization of the cultural services in Belarus is undertaken on a large scale.

Priority No.9

❖ **Continued expansion by investing in new institutions**

New cultural institutions were raised in all six states in the past few years. Nevertheless the pace of expansion has seen a great variance: crises have prevented some countries from doing more, in other cases government priorities were placed elsewhere. Where however circumstances were favourable and the government was keen, an upsurge of new cultural institutions has taken place, with or without an accent on an edifice.

Illustrative examples:

- In Azerbaijan the Stone Chronicle Museum was established and the Carpet Museum received a new venue;
- The Ukrainian Book Institute was founded;
- Regions and villages in Belarus have seen the opening of fifteen new museums over the past few years;
- In Armenia, a new museum and research institute was established dedicated to Komitas and a museum on the origin of book printing adjacent to the National Library was created.

Priority No.10

❖ **Focusing on patriotic morale with the help of culture**

The majority of European countries live within undisputed borders without endangered integrity. Culture in those places has little to do about withstanding threats to the nation. Conversely, all six countries have been facing various existential challenges in most of their independent lives. Culture therefore is expected to boost patriotic morale at a scale that goes beyond the shaping of national identity and highlighting shared values of the nation.

Illustrative examples:

- Many cultural activities in Ukraine have included initiatives to support the army in its fight against secessionist forces;
- In selection for state support in cinema field preference is given to themes on the Karabakh war;
- In Belarus, in the public discourse *Soft Belarusization* is gaining momentum, with increased focus on the history and language of the nation; and before the Day of Independence, a day is dedicated to *Vyshivanka*, the traditional embroidered shirt.

Conclusion

Despite political and economic challenges the consolidation processes that affect structures and contents in culture – processes that began with the transition and state building in the preceding decades – have nevertheless been going ahead in all six countries. We are witnesses of continued consolidation in the fields of legislation, governance, system of institutions as well as policy goals. Preservation and strengthening of heritage is an ongoing high priority in connection to nation building, nevertheless increasing emphasis is laid on shifting towards modernization of the infrastructure, procedures and contents.

Besides identifying the ruling trends and pointing at commonalities and variations between countries, our aim was also to call attention to the great variety of policy options that prevail in the domain of culture and creativity.

Impressum

This cultural policy brief was prepared in December 2017 by the Eastern Partnership Cultural Observatory, a project of the EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme. The content of this paper does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the publication lies entirely with the authors: Péter Inkei, Nairi Khatchadourian, Levan Khetaguri, Kateryna Kravchuk, Zviad Mchedlishvili, Tarlan Rasulov, Veacheslav Reabcinschii, Maria Savushkina.