

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

Serbia

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1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

The Republic of Serbia is a parliamentary democracy located at the crossroads of Central and Southeast Europe with a population of around 7 million. As a successor to several state-forms including the multinational federation of Yugoslavia,¹ the country boasts rich multicultural heritage (prehistoric, Roman, Christian-medieval, Byzantine, Ottoman, modernist (European), socialist) (Dragičević-Šešić & Mihaljinac, 2019). The capital, Belgrade, is among Europe's oldest cities and one of the largest centers in East-Central Europe. Although not an EU member state, Serbia is closely linked to the union. The EU remains main political and economic partner and the overarching strategic goal is European integration.

The small Balkan country is not particularly well-positioned in Europe or globally (see Table 1). Already Yugoslavia was considered a semi-periphery of Europe, and Serbia was “in many ways additionally peripherized during the transition since the beginning of the 1990s” (Dragičević-Šešić & Mihaljinac, 2019; Hughson & Bobic, 2014). As a result of nation-building wars in the 1990s, strict sanctions (including international cultural and educational embargoes) were imposed against Serbia which led to political and economic isolation of more than 10 years. The internationalization process started only after 2000 with the democratic turn (Šešić & Mihaljinac, 2019).

Even though Serbia was granted the status of an official EU membership candidate in 2012, the country is still facing many structural and political issues that constrain its long-term development. The unemployment rate is relatively high (10.4%), GDP per capita low (€6,620), and a significant percentage of Serbians are at risk of poverty and social exclusion (BTI, 2020; SORS, 2020b). In recent years, Serbia has been identified as a ‘partocracy’ or in other words, “the operation of an antidemocratic coalition government that puts the interest of the ruling parties on the first plan” (Orlović, 2008). The ruling Serbian-Progressive Party (SNS) has so eroded the quality of democracy, exerting pressure on independent media, civil society, and the political opposition (Freedom House, 2020). International watchdogs show a steady decline on their indices, much to the detriment of Serbia's image in the world. For instance, on the World Press Freedom Index, Serbia ranked 93rd in 2021 – 34 places worse than in 2016, when it last recorded improvement in the level of media freedom (RSF, 2021).

The difficult political climate and turbulent past cast a shadow on Serbia's international image. The disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), war conflicts, political crisis and isolation also conditioned national identity crisis. The democratic transition in 2000 was an opportunity for Serbia to shed its image of a villain and ‘rogue state’, but stigma lingered and limited its cooperation with other nations (Mertus, 2001).

Globalization has also played a role. The cultural production in the West has often presented the Balkans² (and Serbia) as an “oriental other” (Todorova, 2009) by using the tropes of brutality and crime, violent patriarchy, or fantasies of the “imaginary Gypsy” – a specific set of

¹ The state framework changed several times. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro remained united until 2003 and then changed their status into a state union. Following a referendum in 2006, Montenegro gained independence (and by extension Serbia as well).

² The Balkans is often associated with negative stereotypes. For example, “Balkanization” is a pejorative term for fragmentation of a country or region into smaller states which are often unfriendly to one another. Todorova (2009, p. 3) adds that “Balkanization” has come to denote “a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian.”

stereotypes which is often met with criticism and questioned locally (Klapcsik, 2017; Šešić-Dragićević, 2010). The stereotyped media representations have further cemented the symbolic and unenviable position of Serbia in the world (Ljiljana Rogač Mijatović, 2017). Given the country's primary political objective of joining the EU, external cultural policy and repositioning the country is increasingly relevant, if not imperative.

To compound the problem, there is no coherent state policy on cultural and scientific promotion or strengthening the country's international perception. The first attempt at nation branding came in 2006 with the creation of the Council for the Promotion of Serbia, but it was dissolved shortly after at the onset of financial crisis. Providing funds for cultural diplomacy is still a challenge for an emerging economy like Serbia (Cox, 2012). In fact, the country is primarily promoted indirectly or anecdotally through the achievements of organizations (public cultural institutions and arts festivals such as FEST, BITEF, BEMUS, EXIT)³ and successful individuals, from outstanding scientists (Nikola Tesla, Milutin Milanković, Mihajlo Pupin), artists (Vladimir Veličković, Marina Abramović), to world-renowned athletes (Vlade Divac, Novak Đoković). Rich historical, ethnic, and cultural heritage is another great, albeit untapped, potential of this Slavic region.⁴

Given its diminutive size and specific geopolitical situation, Serbia has historically relied on great powers. Today, foreign policy is best described as a balancing act between different alliances. In 2009, then-President Tadić identified the US, EU, China, and Russia as the “four pillars” of Serbian foreign diplomacy (Novakovic, 2013). Up to a certain extent, the foreign policy objectives are reflected in the ECP orientation, especially towards the EU and China. Owing to historical ties and linguistic proximity, another focus is intra-regional cooperation in the Southeast Europe and with other Slavic-speaking countries. Between 2001 and 2015, Serbia realized 2843 cultural activities abroad in 74 countries with a clear focus on Europe (76.5%), followed by Asia (7.4%), North America (7%), South America (4%), Africa (3.2%), and Australia and Oceania (1.8%). When considering individual countries, the largest number of activities was realized with France, Croatia, Austria, Italy, Romania, Greece, and Russia (Mujović Price, 2019).

Table 1: Country's geopolitical and geoeconomic position

	2019	% change since 2015
Population (millions) / ranking	6.93 / 106 th	7.11 / - 2.1
GDP ranking	88 th	91 st
GDP per capita	6,620	31
Cultural economy (%GDP)	-	-
Education economy (%GDP)	3.59 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾	- 0.2

³ FEST International film festival, BELDOCS documentary festival, BITEF – the Belgrade International Theatre Festival, BEMUS – Belgrade Classical Music Festival, EXIT music festival in Novi Sad. Other notable events include Belgrade Dance Festival, NIŠVILLE, International Jazz Festival, International Belgrade Book Fair, etc.

⁴ The central registry of immovable cultural property lists 2306 cultural sights and monuments (including 512 of greatest importance, 18 archaeological sites). Ten cultural monuments are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List: 8 medieval Serbian monasteries, the medieval city of Ras, as well as the archaeological site of Felix Romuliana (Mujović Price, 2019). See: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/rs>.

R&D economy (%GDP)	0.81	0.11	
Media economy (%GDP)	-	-	
Sources: Eurostat, World Bank, UIS			
Geopolitical position			
Hard power rank	65 th / 0.9479 ⁽²⁰²⁰⁾	-	-
World trade rank (\$ million)	70 th / 43,626	79 th / 38,120	↑
Soft power rank	n/a	-	-
Diplomacy rank	n/a	-	-

Table 2: Government spending on ECP fields as a % of total outlays

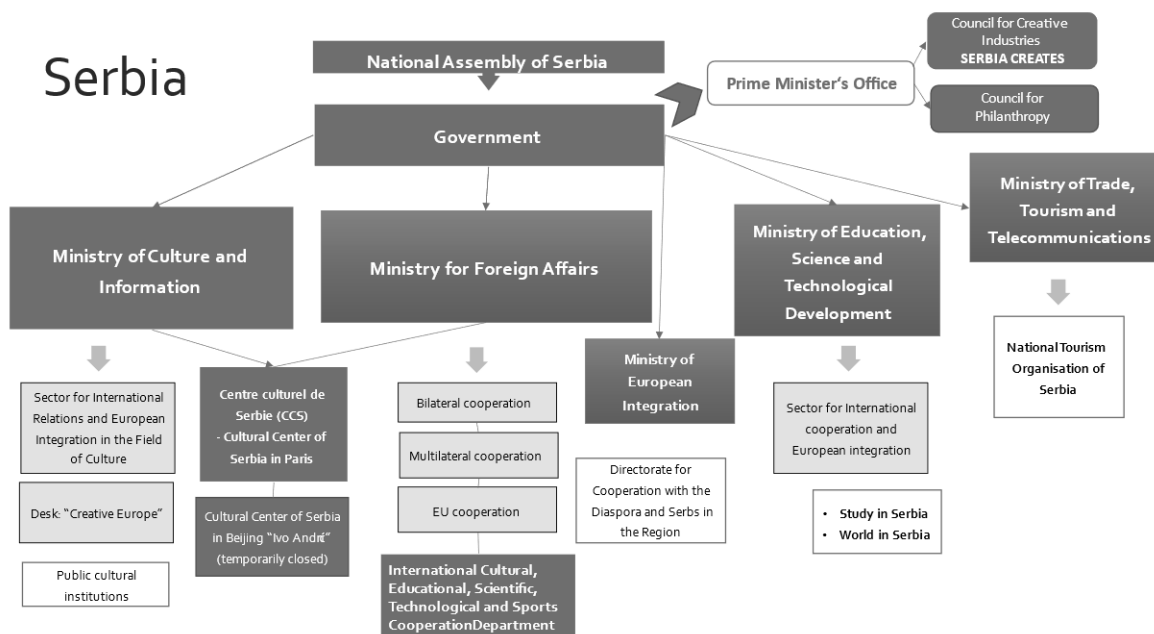
	2019	% change since 2015
Culture	1.10 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾	- 0.26
Education	8.8 ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾	- 0.08
R & D	-	-
Media	-	-

Sources: UIS, Laws on Budget of Republic of Serbia for 2000–2018 (in Dragičević-Šešić, Tomka, & Mikić, 2018)

2. External cultural policy: an overview

Table 3: Key ECP Statistics for Country

	2019
Number of countries with ECP activities	74
Total number of institutions abroad	2 Serbian cultural centers (Paris, Beijing)
Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities	~ 35
Government financial support (€)	International cultural cooperation: 5,719,221
Total expenditure of all ECP operators (€)	-
Comparative ECP ranking	minor

Figure 1: Institutional map of country's ECP

3. Fields of ECP

3.1. Culture and the arts

Table 4: Key statistics on culture and the arts

	2019	2015
Number of countries present	~ 60 (based on signed cultural agreements)	-
Number of institutes	2 Serbian Cultural Center in Paris (CCS) Serbian Cultural Center in Beijing	1
Number of FTE staff	-	-
Number of cultural activities	-	Total in bilateral cooperation: 256
Number of artists in exchange programs	-	-

	2019	2015
Budget (€)	-	Call for (9) projects of European cooperation (Creative Europe): 576,839
Government financial support (€)	Ministry of Culture Competition for financing or co-financing of projects in the field of cultural activities of Serbs abroad in 2021: 127,375 Novi Sad European Culture Capital 2021: 2,877,265 Preservation of the national and cultural identity of the diaspora and Serbs in the region: 861,830	Subsidies for CCS: 84,917

The main stages in the development of international cultural cooperation can be described as follows: a) 1946 – 1990, Serbia as a part of Yugoslavia and the non-alignment policy; b) 1990 – 2001, disintegration of Yugoslavia and culture of nationalism; international embargoes and the emphasis on cooperation with spiritually close (Slavic, Orthodox) countries; c) from 2001 onwards, resuming international cooperation and a turn towards Europe (Zečević, 2010).

International cultural cooperation was already well-developed during the 1950s and primarily implemented through the Yugoslav Commission for International Cultural Relations and the Yugoslav National Commission for UNESCO, as well as through a large number of public institutions in the field of science and culture. Through culture, Yugoslavia sought to change its image in the world and present its socialist model, different from the Soviet one and liberal enough and thus acceptable in the West (Perišić, 2012). The main principles were openness to other world cultures, harmonizing cultural cooperation with vital economic and political interests, establishing balance between exchanges with countries with strong cultural traditions and less visible developing countries, and regional cultural cooperation (Dragičević Šešić & Stojković, 1989, p. 52). During this time, a particularly important instrument was the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a forum of developing countries which avoided choosing sides (Western and Eastern Bloc) during the Cold War. The movement was established in 1961 in Belgrade through an initiative of the leaders of India, Ghana, Indonesia, Egypt, and Yugoslavia. The signed cultural agreements from the fifties and sixties are still considered valid, although cooperation with most African and South-American countries has significantly diminished (Ljiljana Rogač Mijatović, 2011). The network of existing foreign cultural institutes in Serbia was mostly established during the SFRY, as well as its cultural center abroad in Paris. The public culture infrastructure as well as international events of the greatest importance for Serbia today (BITEF, BEMUS, FEST) were also formed during this period.

Over the past two decades, Serbia underwent many systematic changes that mirrored onto the cultural sector. In former Yugoslavia, the cultural policy was marked by decentralization. During

the Milošević regime (1987–2000), however, the guiding principles were extreme centralization and manipulation of culture. Due to the war atmosphere in the 1990s and international isolation, Serbia almost had no intercultural cooperation and in most cases it completely ceased. Opposite the state, a small number of independent organizations pursued an alternative agenda (Cinema Rex, Centre for Cultural Decontamination, etc). In such circumstances it was difficult to conceptualize a coherent (external) cultural policy due to political changes, transitional fatigue, and poorly targeted or incomplete structural changes. After the Serbia-Montenegro state union dissolved in 2006, new priorities and strategies took place. Foremost among these were a new legal framework, concrete actions such as digitalization, decentralization, cultural pluralism, regional cooperation and internationalization (Dragičević-Šešić et al., 2018).

Serbia is set to expand international and regional cooperation. There are 61 active bilateral cooperation agreements, with Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Morocco, China, Bosnia and Herzegovina, having all signed in the past ten years (MKI, 2021a). The country has ratified most UNESCO declarations and participates in major EU programs, e.g. the European Year of Cultural Heritage in 2018. Serbia joined the EU CULTURE program (2007-2013) in 2008 and has participated in the Creative Europe program since 2014, and Eurimages since 2004. According to the Desk Creative Europe, a body within the Ministry of Culture, during the seven-year period notable results were achieved: 152 projects and about €12 million in support for culture (Ognjanović, 2021). On a less positive note, participation in EU programs does not always go according to plan. With a minimum project value of €50,000 and a requirement to foot 50% of the bill, many (and especially small, independent) cultural institutions are discouraged from the very start and choose not to run the application.

European integration has been the foremost priority of the government. Serbia was admitted to the Council of Europe in 2002 and granted EU candidate status in March 2012. Apart from the Ministry for European Integration, both the Ministry for Culture and Information, and the Ministry for Education, Science and Technological Development have internal units devoted to European integration and international cooperation. Apart from the EU framework, the key areas of international cultural cooperation are UNESCO, Council of Europe, International Council of Museums (ICOM), and International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). In addition, Serbia is an active participant in a number of smaller international organizations and associations: the International Organization of Francophonie, the Council Ministers of Culture of Southeast Europe, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Forum of Slavic Cultures, Adriatic-Ionian Initiative, Danube Cooperation and other (Ljiljana Rogač Mijatović, 2011).

External cultural policy is a shared responsibility between the Ministry of Culture and Information (MKI) (Sector for International Cultural Relations and European Integration) and the Serbian Foreign Ministry (MSP), in particular the Department for Cultural, Educational, Scientific, Technological, and Sports Cooperation (see Figure 1). The Department (10 staff) performs activities related to: 1) support and promotion of educational, cultural, scientific, technological and sports cooperation of the Republic of Serbia with other countries; 2) preparation and implementation of bilateral agreements, programs, and other agreements on cooperation in these areas; 3) coordination of work related to the awarding of scholarships to domestic and foreign students. This is the only organizational unit which explicitly deals with the activities of in-

ternational cultural affairs. The Ministry also has a National Commission for UNESCO and a permanent mission in Paris. The other relevant sectors include the UN Department, Department for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe; Department for the Non-Aligned Movement, and in the EU Sector there is also a Department for EU Institutions, as well as a Department for regional initiatives (Mujović Price, 2019). In addition, international cultural and educational cooperation is taking place through 71 embassies, 22 general consulates, 7 permanent missions (UN in New York and Geneva, UNESCO in Paris, OSCE in Vienna, EU and NATO in Brussels, and Council of Europe in Strasbourg) (MSP, 2021).

The Cultural Centre of the Republic of Serbia - Paris (*Kulturni centar Srbije u Parizu* - KCS; Centre Culturel de Serbie - CCS) is currently the only institution abroad active in the field of cultural cooperation. Initially known as the Yugoslav Cultural Centre, the institute opened on May 26, 1973, after the French and Yugoslav governments signed a bilateral agreement on information centers (July 9, 1961). Yugoslavia used to have 12 cultural institutes abroad, all of which but KCS ceased to exist (Aksić & Pantović, 2017). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supervised the center's activities with the overarching goal of acquainting the foreign publics with the political, cultural, scientific and other output, as well as Yugoslav heritage and contemporary artistic creation, "in order to affirm and establish the SFRY in the world" (Mujović Price, 2019, p. 66). In the first years, the primary target audience was the large Serbian diaspora, and actually the KCS had few French visitors (Trifunović, 2010). After 2000 the center showed impetus to modernize its programming and attract a more diverse audience. Since 2007, the Serbian Ministry of Culture has taken over the responsibility of coordinating and financing a significant part of the center's program. In reality, the center is a shared responsibility of the culture and foreign affairs ministries. KCS has a library and very rarely offers Serbian language courses. The center organizes around 20 programs annually. Most of the activities are related to music and fine arts, and occasionally conferences and celebrations of Serbian holidays. All in all, the scope of center's activities is not clearly defined and there is no strategy for the direct promotion of Serbian culture. Rather, the emphasis is on the promotion of renowned Serbs and individuals of Serbian origin who live in Paris and work in the fields of arts and culture (Aksić & Pantović, 2017). The latest Strategy for the Development of Culture (2020-2029) reveals that new cultural centers are planned to be opened in Moscow and Berlin, and the Centre in Paris is likely to expand its activities to other European cities, including Brussels (MKI, 2020).

In 2014, the governments of Serbia and PRC China signed an agreement on mutual establishment of cultural centers. On the grounds of this, in 2018 opened the second cultural center of Serbia "Ivo Andrić" (named after the Serbian-Yugoslav Nobel laureate).⁵ Considering that 45 years passed since the establishment of the only active cultural institution abroad in Paris, the centre marked a significant step forward in Serbian cultural diplomacy. Located in the arts district 798 in Beijing, the center opened with a mix of programs, Serbian contemporary arts and cultural heritage. According to the then-Minister of culture, apart from contemporary creation and film, Serbia was to "be presented to Chinese citizens as a destination of cultural tourism - with various festivals and cultural heritage" (qtd. in Seecult, 2018). Indeed, since visa requirements were lifted in 2017, there has been a steady influx of tourists from China, 15 times more

⁵ In June 2019, the centre temporarily closed because the paperwork was not in accordance with the regulations of China (Sretenović, 2019).

in 2018 than in 2011 (102,351 tourists in 2018).⁶ In any case, China has positioned itself as an important bilateral partner.⁷ According to the Serbian Ministry of Culture, one of the objectives is to promote Belgrade as the regional hub in the fields of culture and arts within the framework 16+1.⁸ Serbia would so become the center of activity for importing and exporting Chinese cultural goods into and from Europe.⁹

The Ministry of Culture and Information¹⁰ is involved through the Sector for International Cooperation and European Integration (5 staff). Apart from coordinating external cultural action, the department offers grants for individual projects like for instance: co-financing the mobility of artists and culture professionals, arts projects for the Cultural Centre of Serbia in Paris, translation of representative works of Serbian literature abroad (in 2019, 68 titles in 18 languages), presentation in international fairs, etc. Granting mechanisms for international projects exist. For example, the Ministry co-finances projects in the Creative Europe program, as well as international cultural programs of UNESCO, Council of Europe and others. The Ministry also supports the realization of cultural activities of Serbs abroad, especially in the neighboring countries (Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia). In 2021, around €127,000 were earmarked for this purpose. An important focus of the current government has been the “renationalisation” of culture, preservation of the Slavic heritage, and strengthening the “Serbian National Space” (Dragičević-Šešić et al., 2018). For example, a recently launched online platform, “Timeline of Culture of the Republic of Serbia and Serbs Living Abroad” has for an aim to present the most important personalities, events, and cultural objects of Serbia and all Serbian people to domestic and foreign audiences (MKI, 2021b).

The Serbian diaspora is one of the primary targets of external cultural action. Historically, Serbia has experienced high levels of emigration. According to national records, the émigré community contains at least 2 million Serbs (and additional 1.6 million living in former Yugoslav countries) and more than 300,000 individuals who spend longer periods abroad in relation to studies, work, or family (Blic, 2020). There are more than 1,300 active diaspora associations in the world, and most of them are in European Union countries, North America, and Australia. The now-dissolved Ministry of Diaspora previously had a Sector for cultural, educational, scientific and sports cooperation, which dealt with the preservation of the Serbian language, academic cooperation, and promoting cultural creativity in the diaspora (Mujović Price, 2019). Now, under the helm of the MFA, a separate entity coordinates these tasks, the Office for Cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the Region. The 2019 national budget reserved 101.4 million dinars or around €861,830 for the item “Preservation of the national and cultural identity of the diaspora and Serbs in the region” (Government of Serbia, 2018).

⁶ Information obtained from correspondence with a representative from the Tourism Organisation of Serbia (TOS). April 9, 2019, Email.

⁷ According to the Ministry, other important partners include the EU (especially Italy, France), Russia, former Yugoslav countries.

⁸ 16+1 is a cooperation initiative between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC, also 17+1) including the Western Balkans countries which are not yet a part of the EU.

⁹ Information obtained from a representative of the Serbian Ministry of Culture, Department for International Cooperation. April 17, 2019, Personal interview.

¹⁰ The Culture ministry is roughly divided into following sectors: cultural heritage, contemporary creation and creative industries, information and media, international cooperation and European integration, digitalization of cultural heritage and contemporary creation.

In order to emphasize the importance of Serbia as a part of Europe, Serbian leadership frequently positions the country as ‘a leader in the region.’ However, cultural cooperation with the neighboring countries is not as developed or is considered natural without the need of state involvement. One exception is Bosnia and Herzegovina and the cooperation with cultural institutions in Republika Srpska which is considered a priority. Other than that, external cultural programs are much more visible in Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece, than in N. Macedonia, Croatia, or Slovenia (Šešić-Dragičević, 2010). Other notable initiatives include Transromanica Routes and the Regional Program on Cultural and Natural Heritage in Southeast Europe, supported by the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The Serbian Minister of Culture also participates in the Council of Ministers of Southeast Europe. The Council is an inter-governmental cooperation mechanism, created jointly with 11 member states in 2005 in Copenhagen (stimulated by the Nordic Council) with the aim to strengthen regional cultural cooperation and exchange. In reality the Council meetings are rarely relevant for the whole region and remain a symbolic gesture (ibid.). Most of such EU framework programs have favored a macroregional approach to that of individual countries (the Western Balkans region for example) in order to avoid inter-ethnic confrontations. However, the ministries might perceive such amalgamation as unnatural and forced. For many cultural professionals from Serbia, the Western Balkans is a coined political term that does not correspond to the cultural space.¹¹ Interestingly enough, two contradictory tendencies in ECP: national identity crisis and the need for integration in the world, were also a common thread in all transitional societies in the SEE region (Šešić Dragičević & Suteu, 2005).

Broadly speaking, there are at least 3 main ‘layers’ of cultural policy: public, private, and civil (Dragičević-Šešić & Mihaljinac, 2019). The public cultural infrastructure remains one of the main cultural assets. The present system dates back to Yugoslavia when it had a relative freedom for cultural production. In the transitional period, the state resumed control over national cultural institutions in order to preserve this vast network (533 public cultural institutions) (Kern, 2015). The majority of these structures are old and improperly maintained and their staff capacities are limited. In fact, capacity building (especially skills in marketing and fundraising) (Dragičević-Šešić & Mihaljinac, 2019) is a major challenge and stands in the way of enhanced international cooperation.

Parallel to that is the direction of the Government, the Prime Minister’s Office. It champions progressive developments like digitalization and programs such as Creative Europe, and generally promotes creative industries (CIs) that could boost the frail economy. Presently, there are 45,136 registered (narrow-defined) creative industry enterprises with 72,112 workers. The booming sector represented around 3% of Serbia’s GDP (or 7.4% in broadly-defined CIs) (Serbia Creates, 2021). It comes as no surprise then that the development of creative industries (and knowledge-based society) is one of the priorities. The Council for Creative Industries¹² was established in 2018. The accompanying “Serbia Creates” platform launched to “to position Serbia locally and internationally in ways that affirm the country’s contemporary characteristics of creativity, innovation, and originality” (Serbia Creates, n.d.). At present, “Serbia Creates” is probably the most important promotional activity.

¹¹ Information obtained from a representative of the Serbian Ministry of Culture, Department for International Cooperation. April 17, 2019, Personal interview.

¹² Creative industries include music, film, photography, radio, television, design, marketing, digitization, IT software, gaming, old crafts and architecture, publishing, books, newspapers, magazines, video game publishing, museums and galleries, visual and performing arts.

Civil society organizations blossomed in the period after 2000 and around 400 civil society cultural organizations exist today, albeit increasingly reliant on state support (Dragičević-Šešić & Mihaljinac, 2019; Kern, 2015). Additionally, the independent cultural scene has resurged under oppressive conditions. Examples of this include Rex, Centre for Cultural Decontamination, and Matrijaršija Zemun. Although the government and the PM's Office have been publicizing the European perspective, it is the independent arts sector that most actively pursues an open and democratic cultural dimension. The organizations are exploring opportunities to increase regional and international cooperation, but most of their efforts remain scattered and not yet the norm.

Finally, sub-state actors are seeking to strengthen their international profile. The Provincial Secretariat for Culture and Public Information of culturally distinct Vojvodina (more than 30% non-Serbs) is the regional body with 18 institutions in charge of their own cultural program (Kern, 2015). The City of Belgrade has a well-developed network of cultural institutions and hosts major international events such as October Salon, FEST, BEMUS, BITEF, Belgrade Book Fair, BELEF, and The Joy of Europe. However, the Belgrade Committee for International Cultural Relations, established in 2004, was dissolved already in the following year, after it put forward a separate strategy (Šešić-Dragičević, 2010). In an attempt to decentralize, initiatives like "Cities in Focus" support municipal authorities willing to invest in culture and art (Kern, 2015). The most positive development came in 2016, when the City of Novi Sad was awarded the title of the European Cultural Capital 2021.¹³ The music festival "EXIT" (declared the Best European Festival in 2017) also plays a major role in internationalization. EXIT Foundation which organizes the festival is also active in the areas of youth development, creative industries, and destination branding.¹⁴

3.2. Language and education

Table 5: Key figures on language promotion

(Language courses organized for the Serbian diaspora)

	2019	2015
Number of countries where courses are offered	10	8
Number of students enrolled	In-class 4,739	4,000
Number of language teachers	53	44
Government financial support (€)	-	1,044,478

The Yugoslav commission for cultural relations with foreign countries considered lectureships at foreign universities an important element of external cultural action (at one point present in 30 countries). Early on in 1958, for example, 13 Serbo-Croatian language assistants worked abroad, 7 in France (including one at Sorbonne), 4 in Germany, and one each in Italy and Poland (Perišić, 2013). The Institute for International Scientific, Cultural, Technical, and

¹³ The scheduled programming had to be postponed until next year due to the global Covid-19 pandemic.

¹⁴ Destination branding is the process of developing a unique brand identity of a tourism destination (city, region, etc) that would distinguish it from competitors (Mathieson, 1982).

Educational Cooperation was in charge of all language departments. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and ethnic and linguistic fragmentation, many of these departments either ceased to exist or were transformed into new chairs for Croatian, Montenegrin, and other Balkan languages.

Since 2018 lectureships are jointly coordinated between the ministries of culture, education, and foreign affairs, and representatives from the Belgrade Philological Faculty. Presently, there is a dozen of Serbian language assistants working abroad (6 in Poland, 2 in Hungary, 5 in Beijing). In comparison, other former Yugoslav countries like Slovenia and Croatia have 45 and 60 lectureships abroad, respectively. The Ministry of Culture considered establishing new Serbian language departments in Moscow, Rome, and Trieste and financing options for the outgoing staff, but with no expression of commitment. All in all, it can be concluded that there are no clear regulations nor planning policies in the field of the language promotion (Mujović Price, 2019). Serbian language courses are rare and usually offered at universities. For instance, the Centre for Serbian as a foreign language (CSFL) at the University of Novi Sad caters mostly to the following groups: Slavic students from abroad, foreign exchange students and degree-seeking students in Serbia, and all foreign citizens willing to learn the standard Serbian variant. Similar Serbian language courses are offered in other larger cities, Belgrade, Niš, Kragujevac.

Together with foreigners eager to learn Serbian, children from the diaspora often attend Serbian summer language camps in their parents' homeland (Živić, 2018). In countries with a sizeable émigré community (like Germany), Serbian children usually have the opportunity to attend supplementary classes in their mother tongue, albeit with some bureaucratic hurdles (Bojic, 2019). The task of coordinating these classes is shared between the education and foreign affairs ministries, in particular the Directorate for Cooperation with Diaspora. According to 2015 data, the Serbian language teaching offer with a capacity of 44 teachers was available to around 4,000 pupils from 8 countries (almost half of which in the German-speaking area). The national budget allocated around €1 million for this purpose (MSP, 2015). In the 2018/19 school year, the Ministry of Education financed language teaching in 10 countries¹⁵ and organised classes for 4739 students (with 53 teachers) (Elez, 2019).

3.3. Tertiary education and science

Table 6: Key figures on tertiary education

	2019	2015
Number of countries	-	-
Number of universities / colleges	65 colleges, 19 universities	-
Number of dual/joint degrees	7 (4 dual, 3 joint degrees)	-

¹⁵ Germany, Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Italy, Greece, Norway, Belgium, Denmark, South Africa.

	2019	2015
Number of students		
Number of foreign students ¹⁶	11,505	9,945
Number of exchange students (Erasmus+)	(E + KA1) ⁽²⁰¹⁸⁾ 470 incoming 927 outgoing	(E + KA1) 388 incoming 852 outgoing
Number of students in joint MA and PhD programs (Erasmus+)	28 ⁽²⁰¹⁷⁾	22
Number of government scholarships awarded ("World in Serbia", "Serbia for Serbs from the region")	~ 100	~ 100
Number of staff / teachers	-	-
Budget (€ million)	-	-
Government financial support (€ million)	-	-

Higher education in Serbia means academic training at one of the four types of tertiary institutions: 65 colleges (applied or academic studies) and 19 universities (9 public and 10 private) offering 1553 study programs (NUFFIC, 2016). With 136 accredited programs taught in English (in 2019/20), as well as many exchange programs, there are plenty of opportunities for international students (MPN, 2018d). In addition, Serbian HEIs offer 7 combined (3 dual and 4 joint) degree programs with partner universities: Middlesex University, University of Ljubljana, Karl-Franzens-University Graz, University of Rome, University of Lion 2, and the University of London and London School of Economics and Political Science (MPN, 2018b).

Internationalization of higher education is one of the priorities. Presently, institutional cooperation is best developed with the countries from the Western Balkans region, for example, within the ERASMUS+ framework and capacity building projects in the higher education sector (CBHE). The most positive development was the upgrade to the status of an Erasmus 'program country' in 2019, which allows participation under the same conditions as the EU members. Serbian institutions were already well-positioned in the exchange program with 7000 outgoing students and staff and 4300 Europeans visiting Serbia since 2014 (EC, 2019). It is the leading Western Balkans country with the greatest number of approved projects, investments, and number of outgoing students. One issue however has been the unequal reciprocity: in the 2018 call 852 Serbians stayed at institutions abroad compared to 470 incoming students.¹⁷ In 2017, Serbia also ratified the agreement on participation in the Central European University Exchange program. In the period 2015-2018, support was provided for 260 students and 332 lecturers (MPN, 2018c). To facilitate all these mobility programs, the govern-

¹⁶ Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students | UNESCO UIS. (2020). Retrieved 2 September 2020, from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>.

¹⁷ Information obtained from the Erasmus+ office in Serbia, April 16, 2019, Personal interview.

ment still needs to improve the procedure for the recognition of foreign qualifications, which is often inefficient and time-consuming.

Despite good cooperation within EU frameworks, Serbian universities are yet to become more visible in the European academic space. At the University of Belgrade,¹⁸ which is the largest and oldest (est. in 1808), study only 5 percent of foreigners, half of whom are from the former SFRY countries (Gucijan, 2016). Therefore, Serbia launched a system-wide project of internationalization in 2018 with “Study in Serbia” promotional campaign. The goal is to attract at least 10% of international students, develop joint degree programs, and involve a minimum of 20% of students in mobility programs. The five leading public universities have developed their own internationalization strategies. Most foreign students (11,419 in 2019/20) come from the neighboring countries, followed by non-aligned countries like Libya and Iran, and countries like Saudi Arabia and Russia (SORS, 2020c). Increasingly, Serbian institutions are looking further than Europe, and often publicize their offer in Chinese, Russian, and other languages.

The Serbian government offers around 100-200 scholarships annually for foreigners. The scholarship program for international students from the developing countries (Asia, Africa, South America) “World in Serbia” (*Srbija u svetu*) was supported with 262.75 million dinars in 2021. Another program, “Serbia for Serbs from the region” (80 scholarships) is targeting Serbian communities in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, N. Macedonia, Romania, Albania, and Hungary (73.9 million dinars) (Government of Serbia, 2020). The Assistant Minister for Development and Higher Education explains that through these programs, Serbia aims “to promote culture, tradition, higher education, and good relations and mutual respect with the member states and observer states of the Non-Aligned Movement, and support young members of the Serbian community from the region” (MPN, 2017).

Since 2007, Serbia is associated with EU research programs and since 2014 it is a member of the EU’s Horizon 2020 program. The EU has contributed more than €30 million for innovation, commercialization of science and research and development. In total, it has allocated more than €200 million for projects aimed at improving and strengthening various sectors of the Serbian economy, especially the Small and Medium Size Enterprises.¹⁹ International research cooperation is good, especially within FP7, Eureka, COST, NATO frameworks. Serbia became a CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research) member in 2019 and cooperates with the research center Dubna in Russia. Some of high-profile domestic research institutes are Institute “Mihajlo Pupin” (ICT sciences), Vinča Institute of Nuclear Sciences, Belgrade Institute of Physics, Institute of Field and Vegetable Crops, Novi Sad, Institute of Virology and Immunology Torlak, Institute for Biological Research “Siniša Stanković,” Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), as well as Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory in the field of humanities. National Council for Scientific and Technological Development oversees the science sector. Generally, patents and technological innovations are rare in the scientific output. The Innovation Fund Serbia was established in 2006 – and has been operational since 2011 – with the aim of encouraging innovation in Serbia. According to the Global Competitiveness Index, Serbia ranked 72nd (out of 141) in 2019, which means that the country’s overall scientific potential is not sufficiently contributing to its overall competitiveness (MPN, 2018a; WEF, 2019). In the 2020 European Innovation Scoreboard, the country

¹⁸ The University of Belgrade placed in 2018 on the Shanghai Ranking between 401 and 500th place.

¹⁹ Information obtained from the Delegation of the European Union in Serbia, April 18, 2019, Email correspondence.

is listed as a moderate innovator (EC, 2020). Serbia has a low capacity to keep local talents (severe brain-drain) and attract new ones. Overall, the best results are in mathematics and natural sciences.

3.4. Foreign Media

Table 8: Key figures on foreign broadcasting

	2019	2015
Radio: <i>International Radio Serbia – Radio Yugoslavia</i> (closed in 2015)		
Number of countries broadcasted to	-	worldwide
Number of languages	-	12
Audience (million)	-	-
Digital & social media audience (million)	-	-
New Media		
Social networks following	Serbian Cultural Centre Paris: Facebook: 4,975 Instagram: 1,024	-
Other Budget (€)	-	Support for informing the Serbian community in the neighbouring countries in Serbian language: 181,043

Serbia is no longer represented in international broadcasting. International Radio Serbia – Radio Yugoslavia (IRS), a state-run station broadcasting in 12 languages²⁰ worldwide (via short waves, the Internet, and the satellite) – ceased to exist on 31 July 2015.

The IRS had a long tradition of almost 80 years. It had been operating since 1936, updating regularly domestic and foreign audiences with current affairs and cultural stories. The initial reason for establishing a foreign shortwave station was the need to counter fascist propaganda. From 1945 onwards the programming focused on international listeners. The eventual suspension of international broadcasting was linked to the ongoing privatization of Serbian media. International Radio Serbia, expected not to be economically viable, was almost immediately scheduled for closure.

The public broadcaster, Radio Television of Serbia (*Radio-televizija Srbije* – RTS), is available regionally, and is a member of the European Broadcasting Union. The channel RTS World

²⁰ English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Albanian, Greek, Italian, Hungarian, Chinese and Serbian.

(*RTS Svet*), launched in May 1991, is the satellite service targeting the Serbian diaspora around the world. The broadcasts were available in Australia, North America, and Eurasia. In 2019, the programming via satellite for the North America, Australia, and New Zealand stopped, and can be instead accessed through the multimedia platform, RTS Planet (RTS, 2019).

4. Challenges and future outlook

The Republic of Serbia holds an interesting position in international cultural relations. The legacy of SFRY provides a good basis for cooperation with other countries and presentation of Serbian contemporary creation. Apart from old “Serbianism” (national myths, religion, language), the ideas of pan-Slavism and Yugo-nostalgia are an important identity layer of Serbia (Ljiljana Rogač Mijatović, 2017). At the same time, Yugoslav heritage is a heavy burden and a source of confusion for a relatively young nation that has yet to define its image and role in Europe and the world. On top of that is the internal struggle between the cosmopolitan, European and traditional Serbian culture, now that Serbia has announced its “return” to Europe (Šešić-Dragičević, 2010). All of these might be the reasons why there is no coherent external cultural policy — the country must first reconcile the many different aspects of its identity and then find proper ways to communicate it.

Serbia does not have any single central organization devoted to the promotion of its culture abroad. Rather, external cultural policy is carried out by a number of actors, often working in different fields and not focusing exclusively on foreign audiences (Cox, 2012). The two major forces that drive international cultural cooperation are civil society and the City of Belgrade. Especially Belgrade with its rich Yugoslav cultural infrastructure and flagship events stands out as the only ‘real’ international actor. Overall, Serbia’s ECP is almost non-existent, and the few active programs and institutions lack organization, direction, and proper funding (ibid.). At the same time, new initiatives (Serbia Creates), and positive developments like the European Cultural Capital 2021 award, indicate that not all is gloom and doom. There is certainly a renewed impetus to enhance international cooperation and strengthen the perception of the country. For that to happen, the government would have to draft a separate strategy for the promotion of Serbia abroad and establish a dedicated public diplomacy sector within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, interministerial cooperation should be improved, including partnerships with the private sector, the national tourist organization, and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce. Digital diplomacy is unfortunately another underused tool that could help improve the country’s profile (Subotić, 2017).

Serbian external cultural policy faces many challenges including a lack of funding (where culture is not considered a priority), difficulty to reform and professionalize cultural institutions, and communicating a new identity that would promote the national interest while also embracing ethnic and cultural differences (Kern, 2015). However, the in-betweenness of Serbia’s many identities can also be a source of pride and a crucial asset (Volcic, 2008). With a rich tradition spanning many centuries and cultures Serbia is for a reason named the cross-roads of Europe, but it should better capitalize on its position.

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D-70020 Stuttgart

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