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## THE EUROPEAN SONG CONTEST AS A TOOL OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

### Abstract

Cultural diplomacy has generally been neglected in the studies of international relations and diplomacy, often left in the shadow of a more direct, traditional, use of diplomacy. Traditional diplomatic practice is nowadays complemented with new subfields such as economic and commercial diplomacy, diaspora diplomacy, and public and cultural diplomacy. Today, in an era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, cultural diplomacy represents a third pillar of foreign policy. This paper defines the concept of cultural diplomacy and explores its active practice in the longest running international song competition in the world – the Eurovision.

Keywords: Eurovision Song Contest, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power

### 1. Introduction

In the contemporary period in which the international relations evolved, traditional and institutionalized sense of diplomacy started to change as well. The establishment of diplomatic relations as a sign of good will, friendship, and cooperation between states does no longer suffice in current international relations. Recognition of states, diplomatic relations, and even opening of diplomatic missions abroad do not guarantee that bilateral relations will flourish. It is not uncommon, especially for small states, to have established diplomatic relations, but nonexistent or very modest political dialogue and cooperation in various fields.

Although the phrase *global village* has become a cliché, there is no better expression to describe the state of the modern world. The consistent and rapid change around the globe calls for change in ways that states communicate with one another. Diplomacy today includes many different players; and it operates in ways that were

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not foreseen by those who codified diplomatic law into a 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the bedrock of diplomacy. This paper defines cultural diplomacy and examines the role it plays in the European Song Contest. A clarification of the concept of cultural diplomacy will be given, followed by a brief background of the European Song Contest. Subsequently, political aspects and various voting blocs will be analyzed.

## 2. Cultural diplomacy

There is no general agreement on what the word culture means and each credible source offers its own stance on it. However, for the purpose of this article, the authors chose the broad definition which explains it as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; *also*: the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011). American scholar Milton Cummings penned the most comprehensive definition of cultural diplomacy as “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding’ which ‘can also be more of a one-way street than a two-way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on promoting the national language, explaining its policies and point of view, or “telling its story” to the rest of the world (as cited in Mark, 2009: 5). Even though the term *cultural diplomacy* has come into use recently, its practice in diplomacy has been used extensively in order to aid international relations. As history shows, cultural diplomacy was one of the most potent tools in establishing a dialogue between the opposing sides. As Prevots (2001) states in *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold war*, „cultural exchange facilitated the Cold War „thaw” beginning in the mid-1950s. Dance and ballet troupes, including the Moiseyev Dance Company, the Bolshoi and Kirov ballets, and the American Ballet Theater, went back and forth between the two Cold War rivals with regularity.

The main aim of cultural diplomacy is to strengthen diplomatic relations and improve the international image of a country in order to advance diplomatic, political, and economic ties and interests, as well as to maintain and normalize bilateral ties in time of tension. It does not only involve activities undertaken by participants from various subfields of culture, but also the “manifestations of their artistry (such as film), the promotion of aspects of the culture of a state (language, for instance), and the exchange of people, such as academics” (Mark, 2009: 10).

This type of diplomacy refers both to the high and pop culture. The first one is more sophisticated and intellectually challenging (Jones, 2013), “it comprehends the cultural products of aesthetic value, which a society collectively esteems as art” (Wil-

liams, 1983: 92), and includes literature, art, ballet, theater, philosophy, classical music, and other expressions enjoyed by those belonging to the higher class in terms of wealth (aristocracy) or status class (intelligentsia). The later one is defined as a less refined form of culture, heavily influenced by mass media, attracting mass audiences, and includes movies, music, television, games, sports (exchanges, competitions), news (reports about people and celebrities, places and events, fashion, technology and slang (West, 2008). Regardless of the fact that it has often been interpreted as superficial and trivial, it strongly influences everyday conversations and the outlook of an individual on various topics.

Cultural diplomacy is stripped of all the uncomfortable, stiff, and difficult elements of traditional, institutionalized diplomacy, and for this reason it represents the best tool in mending cracked relations. American neoliberal political scientist and Harvard professor Joseph S. Nye defined cultural diplomacy as “a prime example of ‘soft power’, or the ability to persuade through culture, values and ideas, as opposed to ‘hard power’, which conquers or coerces through military might”, as reported by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy ([http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en\\_culturaldiplomacy](http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy), 2012). As such, cultural diplomacy represents a medium in creating a foundation of trust, which can later be used for building new or strengthening the already existing ties. Certainly, it is more effective with the general public than diplomatic notes of protest or *démarches*. Also, it demonstrates an agenda for cooperation, and creates a neutral platform for interaction – despite the political differences (Kim, 2011: 3).

### 3. The eurovision song contest

The Eurovision Song Contest, popularly called Eurovision, is the longest running annual international TV song competition<sup>1</sup>. Eligibility to participate is not determined by geographical inclusion within Europe, despite the misleading name of the contest, nor does it have any relation to the European Union<sup>2</sup>. Eligible participants include primarily active members of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), which are countries that fall within the European Broadcasting Area or are members of the Council of Europe.

This large-scale media event has become increasingly popular, being transmitted to over 40 countries worldwide and reaching the audience of almost a billion viewers

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<sup>1</sup> The competition has been running since 1956.

<sup>2</sup> The first year ESC was held only seven nations competed (the Netherlands, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg and Italy). In 2016, 42 countries were competing in the ESC. Seventeen of competing nations were not members of the EU (including many Eastern Europe countries and former Yugoslav republics, Israel, and even Australia) (Gauja, 2016).

annually, making it an excellent medium for creating an allegiance to the European identity, sometimes even more successful in achieving this goal than European institutions which are often seen as intangible and inaccessible to the ordinary people. Eurovision forms and transforms identity through a display of accepted diversity. Even though Eurovision is a song contest, it carries a strong political and diplomatic message of European unity and is often a clear indicator of international relations between participating countries.

#### **4. Political aspects of the eurovision song contest**

Although the idea of the ECS is to promote the unity of Europe by bringing all states in a light entertainment program, with live broadcasting and cheerful audience happily waving the flags of participating countries, this competition has always been an arena for getting various points across. Policymakers and all of those whose job is to look after the image (political or not) of one state are aware that the ECS is a link with foreign audiences. That is why the political element is inseparable from this competition. When Ukrainian singer Ruslana won ESC in 2004, she was given a seat in the Ukrainian Parliament. Serbia won its debut in 2007, a year after Montenegro left the union. Many were not surprised by the fact that Russia won ESC in 2008 (hosted in Belgrade), given that the long-lasting close and friendly diplomatic and political relations between the two states are very well known. In 2014, many understood the victory of the Austrian representative, drag artist Conchita Wurst, as a clear message to homophobes and anti-LGBT advocates (<https://pdgc2013b.wordpress.com/2014/05/12/eurovision-song-contest-cultural-diplomacy/>, May 14, 2014).

Throughout the ESC history there have been boycotted competitions due to voting or political situation in a host state (Spain), false broadcasting in Jordan in order to hide the victory of Israel is a reflection of tangled bilateral relations, as well as expulsion from the ESC due to the unpaid debt to EBU (Romania), and the number of political critiques and protest messages sent from ESC has been increasing constantly. So, ESC is not only a musical competition, it is not only a light show broadcast, and it is not only a time when all the states engage in a show of unity and harmony with their political opponents.

There are numerous examples to support the fact that lyrics of a song are sending a (often political) message to the international community (e.g. Georgia's 2009 anti-Putin entry "We Don't Wanna Put In" – which was disqualified because of the inappropriate political message). The example of Georgian 2009 entry song is interesting because this incident happened just one year after the Russo-Georgian war, and the proposed title of the song was a clear indication of the Georgian public opinion about Putin (Japaridze, 2015).

Even the initial goal of the contest, to bring nations together and strengthen European unity after the World War II, can be seen as a clear political agenda. Tinatin Japaridze, the co-writer of the 2009 Icelandic ESC entry song provides an explanation that sending a politicized message through as song on ESC does not have to be seen as a political propaganda or protest, but merely as an attempt of patriotism, due to limited outreach resources of small countries as Jordan on a pan-European scale (Japaridze, 2015).

The Eurovision Song Contest allows participants to represent their countries to the international community. This is the reason why some countries turn to “nation branding” (Jordan, 2014). Nation branding enables countries to use elements specific for their culture and tradition to promote the country. Each state is represented by a short video which serves as an international postcard to advertise its natural beauties, tradition, and culture in the most enticing and attractive way. This can be seen as a use of the ESC for the purpose of practicing cultural diplomacy. These elements along with many others (locations, history, national variety, position of minorities, size of population, national self-identification) play an important role in the participation of the country and even its placement at the contest. Authors Fricker and Gluhović provide various ways how listed factors can “manifest themselves in the ESC” (2013: 25). They begin with “the nature of the songs and acts that they present;[...] the ways in which the contest is received and represented to European and global publics via the media and fans”. Furthermore, they point out the connections that are made between “social and political movements and the contest”. Authors list another manifestation of shifts and events in Europe and that one lies “in the connections made between social and political movements and the contest; and in the moves of contest decision-makers to accommodate these evolutions via innovation of the contest format” (Fricker and Gluhović, 2013: 25).

One of the most striking examples of using the ESC for sending a political message by using the soft, nonpolitical, medium in 1993 was participation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Jordan, 2014). Since at that time the war was raging in former Yugoslavia, particular attention was given to performers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia, the newly independent countries which made their debut in the competition after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Since the global audience at that time was not getting enough information about the war on the European soil, the member of the Bosnian delegation emphasized the importance of the event at the ESC conference: “We have many problems to come here [to Eurovision]. We go out from the besieged city, running across the runaway in the middle of the night, through grenades, through snipers”. He continued and concluded that the main reason Bosnian delegation was willing to put itself through such risk was because they wanted to send a message and “show the whole world that we are just normal, peaceful people in Bosnia

and Herzegovina and that we just want to live in peace and to do our jobs (Why not Millstreet [TV] RTE 1993)” (Jordan, 2014). Bosnian and Croatian delegations wished to send the same message to Europe and the world, so the ESC in that case had an important role in “demonstrating national sovereignty to a pan-European audience and also representing a return to normalcy” (Jordan, 2014). Their entry songs strongly referred to the turmoil in the region which, in 1993, showed no signs of slowing down. Croatia participated with a song titled “Don’t ever cry” which talked about a young man Ivan who died in the war, and Bosnian entry song was “Sva bol svijeta” (*All the Pain in the World*) which had a similar undertone. Slovenia did not experience similar level of bloodshed so their entry song made no references to the on-going conflict in the region.

Fast-forward thirteen years and again there is a strong message that another former Yugoslav republic was sending via participation (or lack of it) in ESC. The message about self determination and nation-building was being sent from Montenegro – the last Yugoslav republic which remained in union with Serbia under various names. The representative for ESC was to be chosen on the domestic song contest by a pool of judges from Montenegro and Serbia. The contest became a scandal, since Montenegrin boy band called No Name (which represented Serbia and Montenegro on ESC a year before) won majority of the votes. Montenegrin judges were accused of tactical voting for their own group whose song, some argued, carried a political message. Because the two sides could not reach an agreement on how to solve the problem, the union had no representatives on ESC in 2006. Two months later Montenegro gained its independence via referendum.

The ESC provides an arena with a huge audience which allows small nations to present themselves to Europe and the world. It is usually difficult for small countries to represent themselves on a pan-European and/or global scene, so the ESC can be used as an excellent way for bringing the achievements of a country to the attention of the audience which usually has no information about it. The attention gained at the ESC can be advantageous and provides a huge opportunity to promote potentials of the country (e.g. tourism). The contest also provides an excellent arena for countries to enhance their mutual relations or to start off the communication and cooperation with countries they might not have previously had strong relationship with.

Authors Fricker and Gluhović note that the contest is “tied into European economic, political, societal, and cultural life”, therefore, “crucial shifts in the European fabric will manifest themselves in the ESC” in various ways. The intertwining of the contest and listed segments of European life is visible in “the number, variety, location, and histories of countries participating” and “in the nature of the songs and acts that they present”. The role of media and fans in the “ways in which the contest is received and represented to European and global publics” is yet another important seg-

ment in connection of the two. Further on “the connections made between social and political movements and the contest; and [...] the moves of contest decision-makers to accommodate these evolutions via innovation of the contest format” are also important indicator of connection of the competition and various important spheres of European life (Fricker and Gluhović, 2013: 25).

## 5. Voting blocs – the mirror of diplomatic relations

One of the biggest cultural as well as political aspects in voting system of the ESC is the alleged existence of voting blocs: the Scandinavian, the Balkan, and the former USSR Bloc. Voting blocs especially can be explained as a direct use of diplomacy, since countries have set a precedent in supporting each other. In this case, this support exceeds the framework of the contest and good spirit among the contestants and instead represents a tacitly expectation of such support, because it carries a strong symbolical message of interstate support and respect. The consistency of the mutual exchange of votes between the countries which participate in this phenomenon of “bloc voting” is a clear indication that alongside the criterion of the quality of a song itself and the contestant’s performance, two more criteria are present. The first criterion is the already mentioned – the expression of the interstate support between two closely intertwined countries. The second criterion goes hand in hand with the first one and explains that due to historical, political and other connections, countries share similar culture, tradition, beliefs, and sometimes even language. This could potentially support the thesis that two countries with all (or some) of the listed similarities could develop similar taste, likes and dislikes, and could ultimately have a similar taste when it comes to the selection of the quality of song, performers and the performance itself.

According to Dr. Gatherer’s article, *Comparison of Eurovision Song Contest Simulation with Actual Results Reveals Shifting Patterns of Collusive Voting Alliances*, countries tend to give higher points to their neighbors (Adams, 2008). Gatherer concludes that there is a statistical significance of preferential voting in the contest. According to him, the exchange of votes between neighboring countries is on the rise and by now only seven countries can be proven to have stayed away from the concept of voting based on neighboring relations. Further on, diaspora voting is a separate but a common pattern in voting system which leads to growth of the country A support to the country B via ESC voting parallel to the increase of members of the country B in the population of the country A. Clear example of diaspora voting is seen in the pattern of growing preference for Turkish performers in Germany’s voting which is in line with the size of Turkish population in Germany (Palmer and Dodds, 2016).

## 5.1. The Balkan Bloc

This major voting bloc consists of eight countries from the Balkan Peninsula, with six of them being republics of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia) and Albania and Romania.

Even though Yugoslavia did not dissolve peacefully, former republics with various nationalities, which prior to 1990 sent one group/singer to represent them, share common history, similar languages, political affiliation, traditions, and a shared culture. This issue raises an important and yet unanswered question – what is the core reason of friendly/bloc voting? Is it the combination of similar culture and languages with shared traditions or their respective political affiliation caused by former union? Even though states from this Region share similar traditional and cultural values, the strategic partnership and good political and economic cooperation between them is not always on the high level. Therefore, cultural reasons and the desire to send a good diplomatic message by fulfilling a tacit obligation of mutual voting could be the main reasons for the existence of this bloc.

Clear example of existence of bloc voting in the region is the pattern that Bosnia and Herzegovina has formed in their voting. Since Bosnia and Herzegovina has a history of conflict between Serbian, Croatian and Muslim ethnic groups within its borders, the same divisions are visible in the voting data. “Turkey and Croatia are the first and second most popular pieces, and Serbia is the fourth - indicating different groups still vote for different countries” (Stanley, 2016). This shows the political and historic relations of the country with the above mentioned countries, present demographic diversity and different levels of “popularity” of mentioned countries in public opinion.

## 5.2. Former USSR Bloc – the Mammoth Bloc

Russia is perceived as a giant in this voting bloc which itself, due to the high number of states it consists of, could be referred to as the mammoth bloc. In the article which serves as a quick political guide to the ESC, Wescott (2014) supports the claim of William L. Adams (journalist and authority on the Eurovision Song Contest) that “everyone pays allegiance and homage to the mother Russia still. Russia could show up without a song and they could still make the final.” But, the conclusion is similar to the one of Balkan bloc, and that is that “it’s not political, it’s cultural” (Wescott, 2014). Taken in consideration the longevity of relations between the countries of former Soviet Union, their shared heritage, similar culture, traditions and language similarities, it is reasonable to conclude that members of this bloc will possibly have a similar taste and preferences. We have to remember that these countries have shared cultural foundations and that the ESC encourages the expression of cultural and traditional



elements in performances. Therefore, when different countries have similar cultural traditions it is more likely that they will feel the need to recognize and support the presenting of those values to the international community (in this case by awarding performance with points).

Negative relations between the countries need to be taken in consideration as well. For example, relations between Russia and Georgia were severely affected by the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. Direct consequence of the conflict sprang up in the 2009 Georgian entry song “We Don’t Wanna Put In” – which was a clear indicator of what the Georgian people thought about Putin. Even though it was disqualified because of an inappropriate political message and was not scheduled for the contest, the song carried a strong political message.

Furthermore, two countries from this bloc and their conflict were an important topic in 2016 ESC. Russo-Ukrainian conflict and Russian annexation of Crimea and its consequences were clearly displayed in the competition. While the conflict between the countries was still on-going, it was symbolically transferred into the Eurovision Song Contest as well. In the finale of the ESC, Russia and Ukraine were at the top of the ladder and to the very end it was uncertain who would win. By the popular vote (televoting) Ukraine won with one of the most debated and politicized victories since the beginning of the ESC. This has directly already affected the 2017 ESC which will be more detailed explained in a separate chapter.

These two examples show that even between the countries within the same bloc, current political events play an important role in their entry songs and the decision of their votes. But, even though politics and current events have shown to be able to play an important role (this will be explained in more detail with examples) the unity of this bloc is more linked to culture and tradition than to politics. The conclusion drawn is that preferential voting in voting blocs is usually linked to elements such as shared culture, tradition, similar languages and values while the lack of voting among bloc member states could easily be linked to various political or current events.

It should not be overlooked that alongside the tradition, culture and language similarities countries of this bloc, share to some extent the music scene, too (the same is relevant for other voting blocs). Consequently, there is a high chance that an artist from Russia is famous in Belarus, Ukraine, and vice versa. Even with this perfectly plausible and logical explanation from the cultural point of view, there is still a firm belief that some of the former Soviet Union countries alongside some of its former Eastern European satellite countries will give points to bigger countries of the former union (such as Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine) regardless the quality of the entry song. Even though the ESC is a song competition, the idea of giving votes carries some strength and the idea of bloc voting is that countries award their neighboring and strategically important countries for the benefit of relations with them.

### 5.3. Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey

The situation of a divided Cyprus and its international relations, especially with Greece and Turkey, clearly translates to the ESC and provides a clear view of the Cypriot public opinion on the topic. Tendency of Cyprus to adhere to Greece is visible in the fact that the “most lucrative Eurovision relationship is that of Greece and Cyprus” (<http://www.euronews.com/2012/05/21/eurovision-the-great-voting-conspiracy>, May 21, 2012). Between 1975 and 2003, whenever both countries were participating in the contest, an average number of points Greece gave to Cyprus ads up to 9.7, and an average of 10.7 points received in return. At the same time, in the same timeframe (1975-2003) Cyprus and Turkey had the worst possible level of votes exchange – whenever both countries participated in the contest they gave no votes to each other (<http://www.euronews.com/2012/05/21/eurovision-the-great-voting-conspiracy>, May 21, 2012).

It could be that Cyprus and Greece simply have different likings when it comes to music, but it is more likely that the reason behind these voting patterns lies in interference of political and historical relations of two countries with Cyprus, historic affiliation of Cyprus with Greece and the fact that Turkey refuses to recognize Cyprus as an independent country and not an extension of their country.

## 6. Influence of politics on the ECS: UK’s isolationism and Terry Wogan’s commentary

The UK has consistently shed negative light on the ESC, a phenomenon which could be connected to their Euroscepticism, present since the 1970s, and on the rise with the evolution of nationalism in the country. Sir Michael Terrence “Terry” Wogan was an Irish radio and television broadcaster who worked for the BBC in the UK and British commentator for the Eurovision Song Contest from 1971 to 2008, and even as the host in 1998. Wogan is well known for his commentary on the ESC. His remarks were sharp and straight-forward, and even though his comments were often against the ESC (execution of the idea, not the idea itself) and he was clearly and vocally ridiculing the contest - the EBU allowed him to continue working for them without even censoring him. “His media persona as a middle-class, middle-of-the-road satirist of the vicissitudes of contemporary life was bolstered by his Eurovision commentary, which, initially, positioned the British as bemused participants in, [...] what was a distinctly foreign, European spectacle” (Fricker and Gluhovic, 2013: 52). Wogan believed that in the beginning the ESC was about the music, but that through changes in voting practices (and introduction of televoters) politics had entered into the contest. His negative comments about the contest mainly focus on the topics of “political, bloc and diaspora voting” (cited, 2013: 67). In 1998 televoting was introduced, which

meant that votes were cast by the public (and not exclusively by the national juries). In his comments, Wogan mentions the role of the UK and other Western European countries which are in his opinion left behind by various countries of Eastern European voting-blocs, concluding with a strong statement – “we won the Cold War, but we lost Eurovision” (cited, 2013: 71).

There are many reasons why Wogan advocated so strongly against the ESC and why he belittled the competition itself, but probably the main ones lie in his perception of the UK and its role in the ESC (same parallel could perhaps be drawn on the UK-EU relations). Wogan was a supporter of British isolationism and his perception of the UK in the ESC was that the UK is high above that “kitsch competition”. He believed that the destiny of Western Countries in the ESC has been sealed every year before the competition began, because he claimed that one of the goals of the ESC was the promotion of Eastern European countries. But, this raises a couple of questions. What would be the interest of the Western European countries in the competition and why would they even participate? Especially if the role of the Big Five (Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and Great Britain), which make the largest financial contribution to the competition, is taken in consideration. Why would these countries decide to get involved in this competition, make significant financial contribution if they know (or suspect) that they would not win. Primary goal and hope of every nation and every team in any competition is to do their best, score the highest possible and ultimately – to win. If these countries, as Wogan suggests, are in the beginning less likely to win than some other (Eastern European) countries, perhaps the goal of the ESC differs from the goal of many other competitions. Wogan’s suggestion complies with the notion that one of the goals of ESC is to promote unity of Europe, nation branding, and good relations among participants. In that case, the reason for participating in this competition is political and diplomatic – to represent a country in a best way possible through a song and competitors, and to respect the representation of the others.

When in 2008 Russia won with the song “Believe” Wogan took that as final evidence that the ESC voting system was corrupted and politically driven. Wogan commented that he had predicted it, and that “Russia were going to be the political winners from the beginning [. . .] and you have to say that this is no longer a music contest” (cited, 2013: 70). When Ukraine gave Russia 12 points for their song, Wogan explained that as Ukraine’s way of making sure that Russia will not cut them down on electricity and oil. These moves clearly do not influence political and international decisions on high level, but votes of certain countries to other countries can sometimes be explained through the prism of current (or past) events between the countries. The same year Latvia and Estonia gave Russia top marks too, and Wogan explained that “they know where the bread is buttered” (cited, 2013: 71) indicating that their votes were also not based on the quality of the song.

## 7. Influence of politics on the ESC: An example of Russia and Ukraine

The most recent and obvious example of the connection between international relations, historic and current events and the Eurovision Song Competition was obvious in the 2016 contest. At that time the relations between Russia and Ukraine were severely damaged by the situation at Crimea<sup>3</sup>, which started in 2014.

In the 2016 ESC Ukrainian singer Jamala won the contest with a song “1944”, even though the Russian contender was the favored one. Lyrics of the song “1944” indicate that it refers to the expulsion of Tatars from the Crimea in the time of Stalin’s dictatorship (Kampmark, 2016). This clearly political message and an act of protest are against the ESC competition rules according to the EBU. The victory was fiercely debated and argued; there are still strong speculations and belief that Ukraine won because of their then on-going situation on Crimea with Russia. It was speculated that the song “1944” and the content directly referred to the situation through a direct political message and protest against Russia and their politics and actions in Crimea. The singer and the author of the song, a Crimean Tatar herself, later commented that her victory meant that Europeans were “not indifferent, and are ready to hear about the pain of other people and sympathize” (Stephens, 2016). When asked about the connection of the song with the current events in Crimea, Jamala responded “of course it’s about 2014 as well. [...] What am I supposed to do: just sing nice songs and forget about it? Of course I can’t do that” (Stephens, 2016).

The 2016 ESC was interesting because this usually kitsch song contest “took on major political overtones this year, as Ukraine’s Jamala squared off against Russian singer Sergei Lazarev in a showdown that many Eurovision fans saw as a continuation of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine” (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/15/eurovision-2016-furious-russia-demands-boycott-of-ukraine-over-j/>, 2016). Prior to the contest itself, in March 2016 “Russian officials sought to persuade Eurovision organizers to ban Jamala’s song, arguing that it was a politicized attempt to make Russia look bad for its policies in Crimea and the subsequent conflict with Ukraine” (cited, 2016). Rules of the ESC clearly indicate that “the lyrics and/or performance of the songs shall not bring the Shows, the ESC as such or the EBU into disrepute. No lyrics, speeches, gestures of a political or similar nature shall be permitted during the ESC” (<https://eurovision.tv/about/rules>, April 11, 2017). Since “the song got past the organizers even though political songs are not supposed to be allowed” it opened a question whether the EBU and the ESC deliberately decided to help other high-ranking favorites in order to avoid possibility of Russia winning and hosting the contest year later (Methven and Greenwood, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> It has been said that Crimea is “the worst East-West crisis since the Cold War.”

After the victory of Ukraine, Russia and its representatives had a hard time remaining gracious in what was supposed to be a friendly competition and have struggled with accepting the final score. Russians expressed the belief that Ukraine's victory was caused and fueled by political agendas and propaganda. The Russian lawmaker Yelena Drapeko commented for Russia's TASS news agency that "partly, this is a result of the propaganda and information war that is being waged against Russia. We are talking about the general demonization of Russia –how everything about us is bad [...] – all of this, of course, shows (in ESC)" (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/15/eurovision-2016-furious-russia-demands-boycott-of-ukraine-over-j/>, 2016).

The Ukrainian victory was strategically and politically important because it left an open question of the Russian reaction and its 2017 entry song. Even though Russia was considering not sending a representative to Kyiv this year, the artist Julia Samoilova was elected to represent Russia in the 2017 contest. Ukraine then reacted and banned Samoilova from entering Ukraine for the next three years. Samoilova was accused of entering Crimea through Russian instead of Ukrainian mainland, and Ukrainian authorities banned her from entering Ukraine under the accusation that she "illegally' entered the Crimea to perform at a concert in 2015" (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/13/russia-says-wont-broadcast-eurovision-song-contest-singers-ukraine/>, 2017). Ukraine considers Russian 2014 annexation of Crimea to be an illegal occupation and therefore it still reserves the right to "impose a travel ban on anyone who visits it without obtaining appropriate permission from Kiev first" (cited, 2017). The Chairman of the contest's steering committee Frank-Dieter Freiling said "we (the ESC) strongly condemn the Ukrainian authorities' decision to impose a travel ban on Julia Samoylova" because it has negative effects on "the integrity and non-political nature of the Eurovision Song Contest and its mission to bring all nations together in a friendly competition" (cited, 2017). Deltener, the EBU Director General, relieved all doubt that politics has found its way into the contest when she said "we (the EBU) are increasingly frustrated, in fact angry, that this year's competition is being used as a tool in the ongoing confrontation between the Russian Federation and Ukraine" (<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/apr/01/eurovision-threatens-to-ban-ukraine-over-russian-singer-row>, April 1, 2017).

The official website of the Eurovision Song Contest published an official statement issued by the EBU regarding the Russian participation in the 2017 ESC. The conclusion of the statement states that since Russia rejected all EBU's efforts to find a peaceful solution and decided not to broadcast the ESC 2017 it "means Russia will no longer be able to take part in this year's competition" (<https://eurovision.tv/story/russia-unable-to-participate-2017-ebu-statement>, April 13, 2017).

## 8. Conclusion

Considering the international song contest as any form of diplomacy, even cultural, would be unthinkable until relatively recently. However, *tempora mutantur*, and diplomacy is no exception. Eurovision Song Contest in variegated Europe can be seen as a tool of contemporary cultural diplomacy, a form of the “soft power”, as the authors tried to illustrate. Cultural diplomacy, once seen as a type of information or even propaganda in the international relations is rapidly changing in the last decades. Contemporary cultural diplomacy is no longer a one-way process, but rather multi-polar, multi-layered, and braided. The state is no longer its only subject, and its role is often reduced to a moderator or facilitator, and therefore it is necessary to step out of the preconceived notion that diplomacy and international relations are played out only on beforehand established grounds (e.g. political grounds, economic grounds, etc).

While the traditional diplomacy is expanding its range of action, cultural diplomacy gains new possibilities and new roles, spreading to the new spheres of influence. The impact of different efforts of cultural diplomacy is not necessarily direct or highly beneficial for states participating in the ESC. However, it can without a doubt be used as a valid ground for some form of political analysis of current relations. The ESC represents a link with foreign audiences and it is used for getting a political message across. Songs chosen for the competition do not carry only the pure artistic element, but are often the reflection of current political situation. Voting blocs can be seen as a direct use of diplomacy, since countries have developed a habit and expectation from voting for one another. In this case, support shown through votes represents a tacitly expectation of such support because it carries a strong symbolic message of interstate support and respect. The victory in this competition is not only seen as a confirmation of the quality of the song, as much as it represents a victory over ideological and/or geopolitical enemies. Therefore, the ESC also represents a strong “soft power” resource – a way to get a point across through attracting rather than coercing.

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## **Pjesma Eurovizije kao sredstvo kulturne diplomacije**

### **Sažetak**

Kulturna diplomacija je u međunarodnim odnosima i diplomaciji generalno zanemarena kao samostalna oblast i u sjeni je izravne, tradicionalne funkcije diplomacije. Tradicionalna diplomatska praksa danas se nadopunjuje novim oblastima poput ekonomske i komercijalne diplomacije, diplomacije dijaspore i javne i kulturne diplomacije. U doba globalizacije i brzog tehnološkog napretka, kulturna diplomacija predstavlja treći stup vanjske politike. Ovaj rad definira koncept kulturne diplomacije i istražuje njezinu primjenu u najdugovječnijem međunarodnom glazbenom natjecanju – Euroviziji.

Ključne riječi: Eurovizija, kulturna diplomacija, javna diplomacija, „meka moć“