

## **Cultural Diplomacy: Conceptualization of Years and Seasons of Culture as Cultural Events at the Time of International Conflict**

### **Description for the general public**

In 2014 when Russian Federation annexed Crimea, and when the Malaysian plane was shot down above the conflict-hit Ukraine, the European Union relations with Russia deteriorated rapidly. As a consequence, the European Union launched sanctions against Russian Federation. At the same time Austria, Germany and Great Britain performed years and seasons of culture with Russia. German and British media found a paradox in this situation. British politicians withdrew from participation in British Year of Culture in Russia events. After the crash of Malaysian plane, Polish government cancelled Polish Year in Russia, planned for 2015.

At the time of international crisis the EU member states agreed on sanctions against Russian Federation, but simultaneously in a very diverse way evaluated the impact of Russian aggression on Ukraine on cultural relations with Russia. The aim of the project is to study, how European countries – Austria, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Poland – explained the necessity of cultural diplomacy implementation with an authoritarian regime at the time of international conflict and how they evaluated its effects. The first insight into German, British and Polish governmental documents revealed, that these countries understood cultural diplomacy as international conflict prevention means and as promotion of mutual good relations with other countries. But was it possible to achieve these results at the time of an international conflict?

Russian Federation is a very relevant partner of the EU as the whole and for the member states separately, because of – among other things – they energy security. The war in Eastern Ukraine turned to a verification means for the EU strategy of relations with Russian Federation. It verified the use of soft power tools in relations with the EU eastern neighbor.

The project is focused on years and seasons of culture as they have been, as for now, neglected in studies on international relations. No coherent concept serves for verification, what results they brought with themselves for European countries. Years and seasons of culture are usually visually attractive (in media studies they are called media or mega events) and aimed at big audiences. While conducting years and seasons of culture, states share their narratives with audiences abroad and shape their images. The current project studies these narratives, at the same time illustrates how media in the countries, organizing cultural diplomacy events, framed these initiatives, while covering them.

Cultural diplomacy in this project is discussed as a network, consisting of governmental and nongovernmental nodes – and relations between them. It explains why the project is aimed at verification of one of the methods in political science called policy network analysis. The research within the frame of the project should bring with itself answers on questions about objectives and effectiveness of cultural diplomacy at the time of international crisis, but also on questions about the methods of analysis.