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Cultural institutions and soft power in the case of Hungary and Syria

I. Introduction

In many of our lives, traditions and various cultural sectors play a defining role, just as cultural heritage and traditions do in the life of states. Culture is integral to the identity of states and can greatly influence international relations. The field of cultural diplomacy, using so-called *soft* tools, has emerged to shape and facilitate positive relationships between states.

Cultural diplomacy has existed in practice for centuries, even though the term itself was coined recently. Evidence of its practice can be found throughout history, with explorers, travelers, traders, teachers, and artists serving as early *informal ambassadors* or *cultural diplomats*. Anyone interacting with different cultures contributes to a form of cultural exchange, spanning various fields such as art, sports, literature, music, and beyond. Throughout history, interactions between peoples, involving language, religion, ideas, arts, and social structures, continuously improved relations between different groups. For instance, the establishment of regular trade routes enabled frequent exchanges of information and cultural expressions among traders and government representatives.² Such cultural and communicative interactions can be identified as early examples of cultural diplomacy.

Soft power and cultural diplomacy are inseparable concepts that manifest primarily through cultural institutions in practice. What is culture? Why is cultural diplomacy important, and how do states use soft power? What role do cultural institutions play in international relations? These central questions form the subject of this study, aiming not only for general international approaches but also focusing on the cultural diplomacy of two states by introducing their most significant cultural institutions. Syria and Hungary are countries with vastly different cultural backgrounds, making this comparison methodologically challenging and, at the same time, enlightening. Due to the nature of the study, I have highlighted only a few (3-3) cultural institutions for both states, presenting them without claiming completeness. I have done so only to the extent necessary to contribute to a comprehensive overview of the topic.

II. Methodology³

The scholarly form of comparison is not a simple venture; nonetheless, this study attempts to explore the similarities and differences between Hungarian and Syrian cultural diplomacy through their cultural institutions and the application of soft power. To execute this, I have chosen a mixture of common-core, historical method formulated by *Van Hoecke*⁴ and the functional and structural method. Since my topic does not rest explicitly on legal foundations, I found the mixture of these methods most suitable, maintaining a balance with the complexity of the examined issue.

Functionalism is used in micro-comparison, while structural analysis involves uncovering hidden structures. Structural analyses vary based on theory and paradigms, emphasizing a common core with primary and secondary rules.⁵ The historical method is an integral part of

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² CUMMINGS, M.: *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*. Cultural Diplomacy Research Series, Center for Arts and Culture, (1) 2003. Online, 2009. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/MCCpaper.pdf> (Accessed: 2025. 01. 11.).

³ VAN HOECKE, MARK: *Methodology of Comparative Legal Research*. Law and Method. 2015.

⁴ VAN HOECKE, 2015, 9-11. pp.

⁵ VAN HOECKE, 2015, 11-13. pp.

the broader '*law-in-context method*', focusing on the historical origins of present-day laws for comparative analysis. Comparative history has gained popularity among legal historians, providing valuable information and sources. Historical studies often incorporate sociological, economic, and psychological data as well.⁶ In the later 20th century, the approach shifted to finding a common core in how legal systems resolved cases. Challenges in encompassing an increasing number of member states led to a focus on three main legal systems in certain projects. The common-core method, combining the functional and law-in-context methods, seeks commonalities for potential harmonization.⁷

The methodological approaches usually overlap in a scientific research, hence it is difficult to separate them from each other. It is important that we are aware of the historical, cultural, social (etc.) background of the central element of our research so that we can conduct comprehensive work. In this case, my knowledge of language, religion, social structure (etc.) proved advantageous both in the context of Hungary and Syria.

III. Culture, soft power, institutions, diplomacy and their close relationship

III.1. The importance of culture

Culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a group or society. It encompasses the way people live, their traditions, language, arts, and social institutions. Culture is a dynamic and evolving aspect of human societies that shapes individuals' identities, influences their perceptions of the world, and guides their interactions.⁸ The importance of culture can be understood through various perspectives. Culture provides individuals with a sense of identity and belonging. It shapes a person's worldview, influencing how they see themselves and their place in the world.

Cultural identity is often a source of pride and connection. Language, a key component of culture, enables communication and expression. Through language, people share ideas, stories, and knowledge, fostering understanding and cooperation within a community. Cultural norms and values contribute to social cohesion by providing a framework for acceptable behavior within a community. Shared cultural practices and rituals create a sense of unity among group members.⁹

Culture preserves and passes down heritage and tradition from one generation to the next. This continuity provides a link to the past, helping communities maintain a sense of continuity and history. Cultural diversity fosters innovation and creativity. Exposure to different cultural perspectives can inspire new ideas, solutions, and ways of thinking, contributing to societal progress. In an increasingly interconnected world, understanding and respecting different cultures are vital for promoting tolerance, peace, and cooperation on a global scale. Cultural awareness helps bridge gaps and overcome stereotypes.

Culture plays a role in economic development, influencing industries such as art, literature, music, and tourism. Cultural products contribute to a nation's economy and global reputation. Exposure to diverse cultures enhances personal growth by broadening perspectives, promoting empathy, and encouraging adaptability.¹⁰ Individuals who engage with different cultures often develop a more comprehensive worldview. In summary, culture is a multifaceted and integral

⁶ VAN HOECKE, 2015, 18-19. pp.

⁷ VAN HOECKE, 2015, 18-21. pp.

⁸ KITSOU, SOFIA: *The Power of Culture in Diplomacy: The Case of U.S. Cultural Diplomacy in France and Germany*. Exchange: The Journal of Public Diplomacy, (2/1) 2011.

⁹ BOUND, K., ET AL.: *Cultural Diplomacy*. London: Demos, 2007.

¹⁰ TELLES RIBEIRO, E.: *Cultural diplomacy: an instrument of foreign policy*. SIFA Ambassador Talks Program, Bangkok, 2008.

aspect of human societies, influencing various aspects of life. Its importance lies in shaping identities, fostering communication, promoting social cohesion, preserving heritage, inspiring creativity, facilitating global understanding, contributing to economic development, and supporting personal growth.

III.2. Defining soft power

Soft power refers to a concept in international relations that was coined by political scientist *Joseph Nye*. It involves the ability of a country to influence others through non-coercive means, such as culture, political values, and foreign policies. Soft power contrasts with hard power, which relies on military and economic coercion. *Joseph Nye* introduced the term in the late 1980s, and it has since become a crucial concept in understanding international relations and diplomacy. The idea is that a country's attractiveness, culture, and policies can shape the preferences of others, making them more inclined to align with and support that country's interests.¹¹ Soft power is the ability to achieve our goals through attraction rather than coercion or payments. When you can get others to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on rewards or punishments to move others in your direction. Hard power is the coercive force that comes from the military and economic strength of a country. Soft power comes from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and strategies.¹²

This capability of soft power is the essence of a country's appeal, image, and favorable reputation. If a positive image of Country A (seller) is formed in Country B (buyer), then B is more likely to make decisions that align with A's interests. Therefore, we must create an image of ourselves that B finds desirable, attractive, and in its own interest, prompting B to follow us willingly. Of course, this kind of 'soft' influence is an ancient phenomenon; ancient empires also employed it. In the theory of soft power, the novelty lies in openly discussing a country's positive radiance as a matter of power and attempting to systematize its elements.¹³

III.3. Cultural diplomacy today

In today's context, cultural diplomacy can be described primarily as a process of action built on the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and various aspects of culture or identity. It utilizes these exchanges for strengthening relationships, enhancing socio-cultural cooperation, and promoting national interests.

Cultural diplomacy can be exercised by the public sector, private sector, and civil society alike. In practice, cultural diplomacy (or applied cultural diplomacy) involves the application and implementation of cultural diplomacy theory, encompassing all models practiced by individual, community, state, or institutional actors throughout history. These models include diverse cultural exchange programs, international delegations, world exhibitions, or sports competitions. These examples uniquely have the power to influence intercultural and interfaith understanding, promoting reconciliation.¹⁴ In an increasingly globalized world, cultural diplomacy is crucial for promoting international peace and stability. When applied at all levels, cultural diplomacy possesses the unique ability to influence the global public opinion and ideology of individuals, communities, and nations.

¹¹ NYE, J. S.: *Soft Power*. Foreign Policy, (80) 1990, 153-171. pp.

¹² *Joseph S. Nye* was born in 1937, a political scientist professor at Harvard University and was a defense and security policy advisor during Bill Clinton's administration.

¹³ WILSON, E. J.: *Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power*. The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, (616/1) 2008, 110-124. pp.

¹⁴ BOUND ET AL., 2007. 15-20. pp.

Five important principles define cultural diplomacy (Respect for cultural diversity and heritage; Continuous global intercultural dialogue; Justice, equality, and mutual dependence; Protection of global human rights; Global peace and stability). These principles, building upon each other, enable the realization of the ultimate goal: the establishment and maintenance of international peace and stability.¹⁵

III.4. Cultural institutions in diplomacy

Cultural institutions play a crucial role in diplomacy for several reasons. One of them is cultural exchange, because they facilitate the exchange of ideas, values, and traditions between nations. This exchange helps build mutual understanding, respect, and appreciation among diverse cultures. These institutions act as bridges between different societies, fostering connections and relationships. Cultural events, exhibitions, and programs organized by these institutions provide platforms for people from different backgrounds to interact.¹⁶

Cultural diplomacy, often facilitated by cultural institutions, is a form of soft power. It enables countries to influence others through attraction and appeal rather than coercion. Positive cultural interactions can enhance a nation's global image and influence. Cultural institutions contribute to showcasing a nation's identity, heritage, and creativity. This helps reinforce a positive national image and strengthens a 'presence on the global stage.

These institutions engage in people-to-people diplomacy by fostering direct connections between citizens of different countries. This grassroots approach builds relationships at the individual level, contributing to diplomatic efforts. Cultural diplomacy can play a role in conflict resolution by promoting understanding and tolerance. Cultural institutions may initiate programs that bring people from conflicting regions together, encouraging dialogue and collaboration.¹⁷ Cultural institutions often support educational and intellectual exchange programs.

These initiatives contribute to the transfer of knowledge, expertise, and innovation, fostering intellectual development and collaboration. Cultural diplomacy can boost tourism and bring economic benefits. Events organized by cultural institutions can attract visitors, promote local industries, and contribute to economic growth. Collaboration between cultural institutions from different countries promotes international cooperation in various fields, including arts, science, education, and technology.

Cultural institutions contribute to the development of long-term relationships between nations. Cultural ties established through these institutions can create a foundation for stronger diplomatic ties over time. In summary, cultural institutions are important in diplomacy as they serve as conduits for cultural exchange, contribute to a nation's soft power, promote positive international perceptions, and facilitate meaningful connections between people and nations.¹⁸

IV. Cultural diplomacy of Hungary

Cultural diplomacy boasts a rich history, with its roots tracing back hundreds of years to pioneers who ventured across the globe, serving as cultural ambassadors for their native countries. However, the concept has evolved significantly in recent times. In the contemporary

¹⁵ ACADEMY FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: *Institute for Cultural Diplomacy. What is Cultural Diplomacy? What is Soft Power?*. Online, 2023. https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/index.php?en_what-is-cultural-diplomacy (Accessed: 2024. 12. 11.).

¹⁶ BUKINA, T., PERMINOVA, L.: *Cultural Diplomacy: Institutional Contexts*. Three Seas Economic Journal, Publishing house Baltija Publishing, (2/4) 2021.

¹⁷ FAUCHER, C.: *Cultural Diplomacy and International Cultural Relations in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Cambridge University Press, Contemporary European History, (25/2) 2016. 373–385.pp.

¹⁸ FAUCHER, 2016.

era, entities and individuals across public, private, and civil sectors actively engage in cultural diplomacy to foster mutual understanding between states.

Positioned as a form of soft power, cultural diplomacy has emerged as a novel approach to negotiation, enhancing political relations on a global scale. This paradigm shift is evident even in smaller nations like Hungary, a relatively modest European country with a population of only (approximately) ten million and a unique language spoken by a limited audience. Recognizing the constraints of its linguistic reach, Hungary is increasingly investing in cultural diplomacy as a strategic tool, acknowledging its role as a means of connection and engagement on the international stage.

The Hungarian government, responding to this imperative, has recently established a dedicated department to formulate and implement a national cultural diplomacy strategy.¹⁹ While still in its nascent stage, cultural diplomacy in Hungary is gaining momentum. Various Hungarian organizations, businesses, and associations, both knowingly and unknowingly, contribute to cultural diplomacy efforts by actively promoting Hungarian culture globally. These initiatives aim not only to connect with Hungarians beyond the country's borders but also to engage individuals interested in Hungarian culture worldwide.

Collaborative efforts often involve establishing connections with similar groups in other countries, cultivating relationships through shared passions. Hungary's cultural diplomacy is undergoing a transformative shift, expanding from a focus solely on the Hungarian diaspora to adopting a more international perspective. This evolution seeks to establish new relations with other countries while nurturing existing ones.²⁰

IV.1. Historical 'trends' in Hungarian cultural diplomacy

Current Hungarian cultural diplomacy primarily targets ethnic Hungarian minorities residing in neighboring countries. Academic, cultural, and sporting exchanges are actively facilitated to maintain strong cultural connections. This focus extends to regions such as Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, and Romania. Historically, Hungary's population, situated in Central Europe, has been diverse, with various minority ethnicities coexisting with ethnic Hungarians.²¹

Since the migration of the first Hungarian tribes to Europe around 500-800 CE, they functioned as cultural diplomats, bringing and representing their culture in a new setting. Hungary's historic ties, including the Austro-Hungarian Empire, further influenced its cultural dynamics. Following World War I and the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Hungary lost a significant portion of its territory, leading to a notable Hungarian minority presence in neighboring countries. The post-World War II Communist rule, the 1956 revolution, and the subsequent regime change marked significant historical events.²² With the fall of Communism, Hungary transitioned to democracy, allowing cultural organizations to emerge. While pre-regime change cultural diplomacy mainly focused on Hungarians outside Hungary's borders, a more international approach arguably began. Contemporary discussions about Hungarian cultural diplomacy often emphasize Hungarians living abroad, particularly those in neighboring countries.²³

¹⁹ INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: *Country Profiles: Hungary*. Online, 2011, 3. p. https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/culturaldiplomacynews/content/pdf/Cultural_Diplomacy_Outlook_Report_2_011_-_03-07.pdf (Accessed: 2025. 02. 09.).

²⁰ INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: *What is Cultural Diplomacy?*. Online, 2011. https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy (Accessed: 2024. 12. 09.).

²¹ MOLNÁR, MIKLÓS: *A Concise History of Hungary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

²² SÁRINGER, JÁNOS: *A magyar kulturális diplomácia jelene és jövője* (The Present and Future of Hungarian Cultural Diplomacy). Grotius, Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem, 2010, 1-11. pp.

²³ MOLNÁR, 2010.

Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004 marked a significant opportunity for cultural diplomacy to extend the reach of Hungarian culture throughout Europe. While Hungary has a longstanding history within Europe, its strong ties with specific countries have developed more prominently in the last two centuries. The shift from reliance on the German-speaking world to the growing prominence of the English language suggests a future focus on the Anglo-Saxon speaking areas.²⁴ The accession to the EU and participation in the Schengen area have opened doors for Hungary, enabling enhanced cultural diplomacy and connections within the European Union. Since these opportunities unfolded, Hungary has strategically approached cultural diplomacy within the EU through seven main points:²⁵

1. Expanding cultural programs, particularly in small historical towns.
2. Increasing cultural activities for children to foster awareness from a young age.
3. Establishing accessible cultural centers for the general public.
4. Implementing programs to preserve Hungarian culture.
5. Making historical culture more accessible and known in Hungarian society.
6. Showcasing Hungary's abilities within the country and abroad.
7. Balancing current and past culture, combining classical and new elements.

Moreover, Professor *András Bozóki* from the Corvinus University of Budapest outlined comprehensive strategies for Hungarian cultural diplomacy in the document '*A szabadság kultúrája Magyar kulturális stratégia 2006–2020*' (The Culture of Freedom, Hungarian Cultural Strategy 2006-2020). Emphasizing the need for governmental involvement and societal cooperation, the document advocates for equal opportunities and access to culture for all, irrespective of social standing. Importantly, it highlights the significance of creating partnerships, common projects, and cultural organizations to sustain long-term cultural diplomacy with international partners.²⁶ For Hungary's future, a strategic shift toward cultural diplomacy on the international stage is advisable. While Hungary has traditionally directed its cultural diplomacy efforts toward European politics and integration, there is a compelling argument for a more pronounced focus on the East, particularly Russia and China.²⁷

Professor *László Harsányi* from Budapest Corvinus University notes a divide in Hungary regarding the perception of cultural diplomacy—whether as a tactic of cultural politics or as a strategy in foreign relations and decision-making. Reconciling these diverse aspects poses a challenge for the future of Hungarian cultural diplomacy. Despite these challenges, Hungary has made progress in expanding cultural diplomacy programs. In recent years, cultural offices have been established in Beijing, Shanghai, Tel-Aviv, Belgrade, Zagreb, Madrid, and Abu Dhabi. These initiatives, along with strengthened relationships with European states, have led to the development of cultural centers, contributing significantly to the global spread of Hungarian culture.²⁸

IV.2. Future and goals of Hungarian cultural diplomacy

Hungary's future in cultural diplomacy involves short, medium, and long-term goals. Long-term objectives include aligning Hungary's image and position within the European Union, Central Europe, and the global stage. Strengthening the role of cultural diplomacy in politics and foreign relations is crucial for enhancing Hungary's international standing. Effective

²⁴ SÁRINGER, 2010, 2. p.

²⁵ SÁRINGER, 2010, 4. p.

²⁶ INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: *Country Profiles: Hungary*. 2011, 7-8. pp.

²⁷ BOZÓKI, ANDRÁS: *A szabadság kultúrája, Magyar kulturális stratégia 2006-2020*. Central European University, 2006. Online, 2017, 5-6. pp.

https://www.mtaki.hu/docs/kulcapcsolati_strategia/magyar_kulturalis_strategia_060217 (Accessed: 2025. 02. 13.).

²⁸ SÁRINGER, 2010, 2-3. pp.

communication and collaboration across public, private, and civil sectors are key to achieving these long-term goals. In the short and medium terms, the focus is on fortifying existing cultural centers and expanding their reach. Coordination among the foreign relations office, cultural and sports sectors, and the Liszt Institute²⁹ is vital for defining clear objectives. Establishing a national and international perception related to tourism within the scope of Hungarian cultural diplomacy is essential.³⁰

Hungary aims to be culturally active in various regions, including member countries of the EU, bordering nations, the United States, NATO, Visegrad countries, Russia, China, India, Japan, Korea, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe, with additional support from the Committee on Foreign Relations within Hungary and other material and financial support. Future efforts involve expanding Hungarian cultural diplomacy globally, reaching areas where Hungary lacks economic presence. Opening bilateral relations through cultural exchanges can pave the way for subsequent political and economic discussions. Untapped markets like Argentina, Brazil, and Canada, with Hungarian minorities, offer potential opportunities to showcase Hungary's renewed cultural image.³¹

Despite past strained relations with Maghreb countries in northern Africa, Hungary can rebuild connections through cultural diplomacy. Considering the political situation in certain northern African countries, Hungarian cultural diplomacy, given its relative familiarity, could aid in peace processes and building new relations. Moreover there is a significant Roma minority in Hungary, emphasizing the need to improve relations and reverse negative perceptions. Cultural diplomacy can play a vital role in aiding Roma integration within Hungarian society and challenging discriminatory views. Recognizing the Roma's nomadic nature and their unique community, distinct from national borders, offers a potential area for cultural diplomacy within Hungary and across Europe, fostering a European cultural identity.³²

IV.3. Hungary's most important cultural institutions

IV.3.a) Ministry of Culture and Innovation

The Ministry of Culture and Innovation (currently led by Minister *Balázs Hankó*), known as '*Kulturális és Innovációs Minisztérium*' in Hungary, holds a pivotal position within the government, overseeing a diverse array of cultural and educational policies. Its influence is particularly pronounced in the formulation of higher education policies, as the ministry assumes responsibility for the management of Hungary's higher education system. One of its primary functions is the formulation of policies and regulations that govern the operations of universities and other higher education institutions across the country. Additionally, the ministry allocates funding to support higher education endeavors and oversees the equitable distribution of resources to universities and research institutions.³³

Facilitating the internationalization of higher education in Hungary is another key focus of the Ministry of Culture and Innovation. The ministry actively fosters collaboration and cooperation between Hungarian universities and their counterparts worldwide. This international outreach

²⁹ *The Liszt Institute* (Hungarian: Liszt Intézet) operates globally as a non-profit cultural organization, receiving funding from Hungary's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Its mission involves disseminating and advocating for Hungarian language and culture internationally, contributing significantly to Hungary's cultural diplomacy goals.

³⁰ SÁRINGER, 2010. 9. p.

³¹ SÁRINGER, 2010. 9. p.

³² ROBINS, KEVIN: *Why Roma? A brief introduction*. Routledg, (14/6) 2010, 639-642. pp. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13604813.2010.525073> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 11.).

³³ MAGYARORSZÁG KORMÁNYA: *Kulturális és Innovációs Minisztérium*. Online, 2023. <https://kormany.hu/kulturalis-es-innovacios-miniszterium> (Accessed: 2025. 02. 06.).

extends to supporting international students and researchers, while also encouraging Hungarian students and academics to engage in diverse international exchange programs. Furthermore, the ministry holds the responsibility of overseeing the accreditation and quality assurance of higher education institutions within Hungary. Through close collaboration with the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, the ministry ensures that universities and other educational entities adhere to rigorous standards of academic quality and excellence. In summary, the Ministry of Culture and Innovation plays a vital role in shaping the landscape of higher education in Hungary. Its policies and programs have been instrumental in fostering a robust and dynamic higher education sector, contributing significantly to the scientific and technological advancements of the country.³⁴

IV.3.b) Hungarian National Museum

The origins of the Hungarian National Museum can be traced back to 1802 when *Count Ferenc Széchenyi* established the National Széchenyi Library. A year later, his wife donated a mineral collection, prompting the expansion of the institution into the Hungarian National Museum, encompassing general and natural history in addition to its library function. In 1807, the Hungarian National Parliament enacted legislation to formalize the museum's existence and sought national contributions to support its development. The period of 1832–1834 witnessed further growth facilitated by the Hungarian Parliament, which allocated half a million forint for the construction of a new museum building. During this time, the Hungarian National History Museum was officially established under the auspices of the Hungarian National Museum.³⁵ The museum relocated to its present location in 1846, occupying a neo-classical building designed by *Mihály Pollack*.³⁶

In 1848, the museum played a pivotal role in the Hungarian Revolution, becoming a symbol of national identity. *Sándor Petőfi's*³⁷ influential 12 points and the renowned poem *Nemzeti dal* were read on the museum's steps, contributing to its significance. Commemorating the revolution, statues of *János Arany*³⁸ and a memorial tablet to *Sándor Petőfi* were added in 1883 and 1890, respectively. The museum's Ceremonial hosted sessions of the Upper House of Parliament until the new Parliament building was constructed. Today, the museum serves as a focal point for commemorations of the National Commemorations Day of 1848. In 1949, legislative changes mandated the separation of the ethnographic and natural history sections from the Hungarian National Museum, giving rise to the Hungarian Natural History Museum and Ethnographic Museum. This restructuring also contributed to the establishment of the modern-day National Széchenyi Library. Despite these divisions, the museums remain interconnected, with additional institutions and monuments affiliating over time. The Castle Museum in Esztergom became the latest addition in 1985.³⁹

³⁴ UNIRANK: *Ministry of Culture and Innovation*. Online, 2023. <https://www.4icu.org/institutions/hu/156.html> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 22.).

³⁵ HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM: *About Us*. Online, 2023. <https://mnmu.hu/en/about-us> (Accessed: 2025. 01. 09.).

³⁶ *Mihály Pollack* (born Michael Pollack; August 30, 1773 – January 3, 1855) was a Hungarian architect of Austrian origin, renowned for his contributions to neoclassical architecture. His most notable achievement is the design and construction of the Hungarian National Museum (1837–46).

³⁷ *Sándor Petőfi*, a Hungarian poet and liberal revolutionary, holds the title of Hungary's national poet and stands as a prominent figure in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.

³⁸ *János Arany*, a Hungarian poet, writer, translator, and journalist, is frequently referred to as the 'Shakespeare of ballads'. His extensive body of work includes over 102 ballads translated into more than 50 languages, along with the renowned Toldi trilogy.

³⁹ MUSEUM.HU: *Hungarian National Museum*. Online, 2023. http://www.museum.hu/museum/55/Hungarian_National_Museum (Accessed: 2024. 12. 09.).

IV.3.c) Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia)

Founded in 1825 by *Count Istvan Széchenyi*, a prominent Hungarian reformer, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences emerged in response to his call for the infusion of socio-economic and technical advancements from contemporary Europe into Hungary. *Count Széchenyi*, a visionary figure, devoted his annual income to establishing the Hungarian Learned Society, the predecessor of the Academy, setting an inspiring precedent that resonated widely, attracting support from both aristocrats and commoners. The Academy's inception became a testament to the collective generosity of the entire nation.⁴⁰

Functioning as an independent autonomous entity, the Academy has consistently played a leading role in Hungary's scientific pursuits. Through the provision of prizes, awards, and various grants, it has made substantial financial and moral contributions to the advancement of the Hungarian scientific community. Governed by the principles of self-government, the Academy is led by the President and the Presidium. Presently, the Academy boasts a membership of 682 individuals, categorized into 241 Ordinary, 86 Corresponding, 212 Honorary, and 143 External Members. In addition to its national role, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has forged bilateral agreements with scientific organizations in 49 countries and holds membership in over 200 international non-governmental organizations, further solidifying its standing in the global scientific community.⁴¹

V. Syria's cultural diplomacy

*'Cultural Diplomacy can play a number of roles; mostly in terms of conflict prevention. Often when you have interstate conflict, it can happen as a result of lack of understanding. (...) Understanding not only the political context and the economic context, but also understanding the social and cultural context, is vital to eventually solving an issue such as in Syria.'*⁴²

Syria has faced significant challenges, including a civil war that began in 2011. The conflict has had a profound impact on various aspects of the country, including its cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy involves the exchange of cultural elements, such as art, literature, music, and traditions, to foster understanding and build relationships between nations. However, in the case of Syria, the ongoing conflict has posed obstacles to the promotion of cultural diplomacy. Before the conflict, Syria had a rich cultural heritage with a history that spanned thousands of years. The country was home to various archaeological sites, historical landmarks, and a diverse cultural tapestry. The capital, Damascus, and the ancient city of Aleppo were known for their historical significance.⁴³ While Syria's cultural diplomacy efforts may have existed before the conflict, the intensity and scale of the war have likely disrupted many cultural initiatives. The destruction of infrastructure, loss of lives, displacement of people, and the overall humanitarian crisis have understandably shifted the focus from cultural diplomacy to more pressing issues. It's essential to note that the situation in Syria is complex and dynamic, and information about specific cultural diplomacy initiatives during the conflict may be limited. Additionally, the

⁴⁰ INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE COUNCIL: *Hungary, Hungarian Academy of Sciences*. Online 2023. <https://council.science/member/hungary-hungarian-academy-of-sciences/> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 09.).

⁴¹ HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES: *MTA and Science*. Online, 2015. <https://mta.hu/english/mta-and-science-106125> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 09.).

⁴² The words of *H.E. Amb. John Holmes* (Ambassador of Canada to Turkey). The Ankara Conference on Peace-building & Reconciliation; Ankara, Turkey, April 2012.

ACADEMY FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: *Cultural Diplomacy in Conflict Prevention*. Online, 2012. <https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/index.php?cultural-diplomacy-in-conflict-prevention> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 06.).

⁴³ DÁVILA-RUHAAR, S.: *Beyond the Destruction of Syria: Considering a Future in Syria and the Protection of the Right to Culture*. J. MARSHALL REV. INTELL. PROP. L. (15) 2016. 522-542. pp.

political landscape and the international response to the Syrian conflict have influenced the country's ability to engage in diplomatic efforts, including those related to culture.⁴⁴ In addition to cultural, ethnic, and other fundamental differences, the wartime situation is a factor that must be taken into account when comparing it with Hungary. It puts the diplomatic situation of the two countries in a completely different perspective.

V.1. The unique situation of Syria

Cultural relations and diplomacy in the region should be seen as a combination of cultural interactions occurring within the framework of four key aspects: states, society, markets, and knowledge producers. Despite significant variations in international cultural relations policies among different countries, governments (excluding those dealing with internal conflicts and instability) continue to invest in cultural relations to advance national interests. These investments typically emphasize heritage and tourism policies, as well as cinema, creating co-funding opportunities for both the European Union (EU) and its Member States. Due to its substantial influence, the EU remains the primary contributor to cultural cooperation in these sectors. The EU's co-financing, such as that provided to the Anna Lindh Foundation,⁴⁵ specifically targets cultural relations between civil society organizations. The EU's comprehensive Euro-Med programs encompass cultural heritage and tourism, youth initiatives, media and audiovisuals, performing arts, and cultural policies. Despite the impressive amounts spent, they fall short of adequately addressing regional challenges, including societal tensions before the Arab Spring,⁴⁶ socio-economic hardships, domestic turmoil, and regional conflicts since the uprisings.⁴⁷ In recent years, significant changes have taken place in Syria's cultural diplomacy and the condition of its cultural institutions. These new directions are closely linked to the evolving political landscape: after over a decade of war and armed conflict, Syria was readmitted to the Arab League in 2023, marking a step toward regional reintegration.⁴⁸ Additionally, the February 2023 earthquake inflicted major damage on Syria's cultural heritage, prompting new international recovery efforts.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ DÁVILA-RUHAAK, 2016.

⁴⁵ The *Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue of Cultures* is a network of civil society organizations with the aim of promoting intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean region. Amidst a historical era marked by rising mistrust and polarization, the *Anna Lindh Foundation* advocates for alternative narratives to combat extremism. Emphasizing the importance of inclusive and empathetic societies, they conduct impactful research on international policymaking, offering unique insights into conflict dynamics. Through a movement that encourages dialogue and exchange, the foundation unites civil societies to multiply their impact. Ultimately, their belief in the power of dialogue aims to enhance tolerance, freedom, and progress while providing hope and courage to oppressed individuals worldwide.

ANNA LINDTH FOUNDATION: *Home*. Online, 2023. <https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 12.).

⁴⁶ *The Arab Spring*, beginning in late 2010, denotes a series of pro-democracy uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa. Driven by socio-economic grievances and a desire for political reform, citizens mobilized against long-standing authoritarian regimes. Key events included the ousting of Tunisia's President Ben Ali, Egypt's Mubarak stepping down, and the civil war in Libya resulting in Gaddafi's overthrow. Yemen and Syria also witnessed significant unrest. While some nations experienced political changes, others faced prolonged conflicts. The Arab Spring reshaped the region's political landscape, sparking discussions on governance, democracy, and human rights.

⁴⁷ HELLY, DAMIEN: *Cultural Diplomacy and Cooperation in the Mediterranean: a Constant Investment*. IEMed. Mediterranean Yearbook, 2017, 308-309. pp.

⁴⁸ AlJazeera: *Arab League brings Syria back into its fold after 12 years*. Online, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/7/arab-league-agrees-to-bring-syria-back-into-its-fold> (Accessed: 2025. 04. 30.).

⁴⁹ UNDP: *UNDP's response Türkiye-Syria earthquakes* <https://www.undp.org/turkiye-syria-earthquakes> (Accessed: 2024.04.30.).

V.2. The peculiarities of Syrian cultural diplomacy

City-to-city relationships in the Mediterranean, especially involving diaspora groups, are vital for cultural diplomacy. Major cultural institutes like Spanish Cooperation, British Council, Goethe Institute, and Institut Français drive cultural diplomacy in performing arts, visual arts, design, and cultural management training. Despite historical disagreements on cultural property restoration, archaeological cooperation persists.⁵⁰ International organizations respond to cultural heritage destruction in Syria (and Iraq as well, however this study focuses mainly on Syria in the region, hence I will not elaborate on the Iraqi perspective), with distinct approaches in crisis-affected and peaceful regions. Efforts focus on supporting artists in exile, and initiatives target Syrian refugees, including EU-funded programs. The 2015 refugee crisis raised concerns about Europe's readiness for intercultural differences. Migration issues require evidence-based policy approaches for integration. Cultural relations in Syria and in the Mediterranean vary based on government policies. The evolving cultural environment in the region, influenced by states, markets, societies, and knowledge producers, requires regular monitoring. Knowledge production and research play a crucial role in maintaining exchanges between societies.⁵¹

National and regional cultural policies often rely on multilateral bodies or NGOs. Policies linking domestic strategies with regional, intercultural objectives could enhance Syria's diplomacy. Long-term investment in cultural relations can prevent violence and contribute to harmonious, economically developed multi-identity societies. Technology and demographic trends impact cultural relations, emphasizing the need for substantial investment in skills enhancement and content production. Demographic realities stress focusing on young people, involving them in educational, scientific, sports, and professional exchanges. Initiatives like the Anna Lindh Foundation's programs deepen intercultural dialogue with young people.⁵²

In recent years, cultural cooperation programs have predominantly focused on young audiences, generating new knowledge and research on youth in societal dynamics. The EU faces renewed challenges in interreligious relations and dialogue due to the impact of jihadist terrorism on Mediterranean societies. The focus is now on counter-radicalization and prevention, but cultural diplomacy has proven limited in countering violent extremism, necessitating the development of alternative narratives and policies.

The cultural sector, along with academics and policymakers, plays a crucial role in creating new forms of economic, societal, and aesthetic value to address these challenges. Investing in intercultural communication and competences enhances self-awareness and skills to navigate cultural differences. Rigorous research into mutual perceptions can guide policymakers and societies in designing effective cultural initiatives within broader economic and political contexts.⁵³ Digital tools have gained prominence in Syria's cultural diplomacy. In 2024, the Syrian Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Telecommunications collaborated on digitizing cultural content and promoting national identity online. The initiatives include virtual

⁵⁰ It is important to mention, that Syria has Hungarian related archeological sites and an archeological team working in the country led by *Balázs Major* (Hungarian archaeologist, historian, lecturer at Pázmány Péter Catholic University). Despite the ongoing conflict in Syria, the Hungarian archaeological team persevered in their mission at *Margat Castle*, a nearly untouched area in the coastal zone. While war has impacted the region, the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities actively supports the mission by facilitating permits, visas, and financial assistance. The team, composed of dedicated Hungarian and Syrian colleagues, is focused on processing artifacts and documenting castles using advanced technologies. Their work extends to the *Crac des Chevaliers castle*, significantly damaged during the conflict, with Hungarian government support through the *Hungary Helps Agency*. This assistance not only aids urgent restoration work but also provides employment and sustenance for the local population.

⁵¹ HELLY, 2017, 309. p.

⁵² HELLY, 2017, 310. p.

⁵³ HELLY, 2017, 310. p.

exhibitions, digital art competitions, and efforts to make cultural materials more accessible through improved internet services. The government has also emphasized the importance of monitoring and promoting cultural content that strengthens social values and identity in digital spaces.⁵⁴

In conclusion, cultural diplomacy in Syria is part of a broader cultural cooperation landscape shaped by interactions between states and societies. Euro-Med frameworks, focusing on cultural relations and diplomacy, involve substantial investments by the EU and its Member States in people-to-people contacts. However, trust-building in the region is challenging amidst conflicts, violent extremism, and migratory pressures. Successful Syrian cultural diplomacy requires the continual maintenance and development of networks and communities involving cultural professionals, entrepreneurs, policymakers, civil society activists, and academics—creating forms of cultural resilience to withstand crises and shocks.⁵⁵

V.3. Most important cultural institutions in Syria⁵⁶

V.3.a) The Ministry of Culture's comprehensive vision, objectives and tasks

In its unwavering commitment to cultural enrichment and preservation, Syria's Ministry of Culture has outlined a comprehensive set of objectives that form the backbone of its mission. At the forefront of its priorities is the preservation of the nation's rich civilizational and cultural identity. The ministry – currently led by *Dr. Lubanah Mshaweh* since 2020 - recognizes the importance of safeguarding both tangible and intangible elements of the archaeological and historical heritage, viewing them as cornerstones that anchor the country's narrative across time.⁵⁷ A pivotal aspect of the ministry's mandate lies in its dedication to cultural dissemination. This commitment extends not only to the local populace but also encompasses a broader reach, fostering connections with Arab and international cultures. The goal is not just to share Syria's cultural tapestry but to engage in a meaningful dialogue with diverse global cultures, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation. The Ministry of Culture sees the nurturing of the creative process as central to its mission. By continually developing and expanding the horizons of creativity, the ministry seeks to propel Syria's cultural contributions onto the world stage. This involves a holistic approach that cares for the educated, protecting the cultural output and ensuring that the fruits of intellectual and artistic endeavors receive the recognition and support they deserve.⁵⁸

In tandem with these cultural objectives, the ministry actively engages in the formulation of legislation, regulations, and laws. This legislative framework aligns with the broader visions and objectives of the ministry, providing a robust foundation for cultural preservation and development. Transparency is a guiding principle, with a commitment to ensuring that information is readily accessible, facilitating a more informed and engaged citizenry. Efficiency and optimization are key tenets of the ministry's strategy. By fostering integration, streamlining workflow, and eliminating duplication in procedures and tasks, the ministry aims to reduce wastage of time and effort. The ultimate goal is to enhance job performance, creating a more

⁵⁴ ArchDaily: *Independent Heritage Documentation: How Digital Tools and Photogrammetry Are Reshaping Preservation Efforts*. Online, 2025. <https://www.archdaily.com/1026993/independent-heritage-documentation-how-digital-tools-and-photogrammetry-are-reshaping-preservation-efforts> (Accessed: 2025. 04. 30.).

⁵⁵ HELLY, 2017, 311. p.

⁵⁶ Syria officially: Syrian Arab Republic.

⁵⁷ INTERNET ARCHIVE: '*Ministry of culture*' (in Arabic). Archived from the original on 23 November 2020. <https://web.archive.org/web/20201123104506/http://moc.gov.sy/culture-administrations/> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

⁵⁸ SYRIAN ARAB NEWS AGENCY: '*President al-Assad issues decree no. 273 on forming the new government*'. Online, 2014. <https://www.sana.sy/en/?p=11376> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

agile and responsive cultural apparatus.⁵⁹ The ministry embraces technological advancements, aspiring to achieve integration with the information infrastructure and the comprehensive automation system in the country. The adoption of the feedback principle enhances flexibility and encourages perpetual renewal in planning and decision-making. Clear standards of performance and task descriptions permeate all administrative structures at various levels, fostering accountability and clarity in roles. A fundamental shift toward decentralization characterizes the ministry's approach. This involves planning according to objectives, raising the qualification and training standards for employees, and actively seeking to attract, develop, and nurture talents. By cultivating a dynamic and empowered workforce, the Ministry of Culture sets the stage for a vibrant and resilient cultural landscape that resonates both nationally and internationally. The Ministry has a holistic and forward-looking cultural agenda, positioning the institution as a steward of Syria's cultural legacy and a catalyst for creative expression and exchange.⁶⁰

The Ministry is tasked with a multifaceted mission aimed at fostering cultural enrichment and societal development. Central to its responsibilities is the dissemination of knowledge and culture among the masses, with a focus on introducing Arab civilization and facilitating interaction with major global cultures. It strives to guide the people towards a correct national direction, developing their awareness, strengthening moral spirit, and instilling a sense of responsibility, cooperation, and dedication to service for both the nation and humanity. In the realm of popular culture, the Ministry aims to facilitate means of access, diversify methods, and broaden the scope of cultural engagement. This involves enriching popular culture with modern innovations and ensuring that the benefits reach the largest possible audience. Additionally, the Ministry actively engages with foreign cultural and artistic institutions, leveraging their activities to enrich the cultural landscape in Syria. This includes inviting esteemed figures in culture, thought, and art from around the world to visit the Syrian Arab Republic and share their insights through lectures and talks.⁶¹ The implementation of cultural treaties with foreign and Arab governments falls within the jurisdiction of the Ministry, emphasizing international collaboration and cultural exchange. It plays a pivotal role in organizing a diverse range of cultural events, from exhibitions, festivals, and artistic parties to conferences, competitions, and the establishment of cultural associations. The Ministry is dedicated to tracking the activities of these associations and providing support to ensure the fulfillment of their tasks. Preservation of heritage is a core focus, encompassing the revival of the ancient Arab heritage in science, literature, and research.⁶²

This institution strives to ensure the safety and adaptability of this heritage to modern sciences, arts, and inventions. Their commitment extends to the discovery and preservation of the archaeological and historical heritage of the Syrian Arab Republic for the benefit of future generations. The creation of museums, including archaeological, historical, artistic, and folk museums, is a significant initiative. They also collaborate in organizing museums affiliated with other state ministries, departments, and public institutions, contributing to the preservation and display of cultural artifacts. Another vital aspect of the Ministry's mandate involves encouraging and directing arts and literature in a manner that aligns with the state's interests. This includes supporting professionals in these fields, securing their future, and promoting the development and enhancement of literature and folk arts. The collection and dissemination of information about arts and literature play a crucial role in this overarching effort. In essence,

⁵⁹ INTERNET ARCHIVE: 'Ministry of Culture', 2020.

⁶⁰ INTERNET ARCHIVE: *Syrian People's Assembly*. "القانون 54 لعام 2006 إحداث دار الأس". Archived from the original on 25 December 2020. <https://shorturl.at/dIA67> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

⁶¹ SYRIAN ARAB NEWS AGENCY, 2014.

⁶² INTERNET ARCHIVE: *Syrian People's Assembly*. "إحداث معهد عال للموسيقى بدمشق". parliament.gov.sy. Archived from the original on 25 December 2020. <https://shorturl.at/fopBH> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

the Ministry of Culture operates as a dynamic force, not only in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of Syria but also in actively shaping a vibrant and forward-looking cultural landscape that engages both the national and international communities.⁶³

V.3.b) National Museum of Damascus

The National Museum in Damascus stands as a venerable institution with a history dating back to its establishment in 1919 under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Its origins can be traced to the initial housing of collections at Madrasa al-'Adiliya,⁶⁴ and over the years, it has evolved into a paramount repository of Syria's rich cultural heritage. The pivotal moment in the museum's trajectory occurred in 1936 when the Umayyad palace of Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi⁶⁵ was unearthed in the Syrian desert. This discovery served as a catalyst for plans to construct a more expansive and modern facility for the National Museum. The chosen location for the new museum was a building adjacent to Al-Takiyya al-Sulaymaniya,⁶⁶ a strategic decision that laid the foundation for the museum's prominence. To underscore the significance of the Islamic period, the front façade of the Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi was carefully transposed and reconstructed to serve as the National Museum's grand entrance. This architectural feat not only symbolized the museum's commitment to preserving historical treasures but also became a testament to the meticulous efforts of curators and experts involved in its establishment.⁶⁷

The completion of this transformative project culminated in the official opening of the National Museum of Damascus in 1950. A testament to its ongoing commitment to expanding and enriching its collections, the museum witnessed subsequent expansions. In 1953, a three-storey wing was added to accommodate and showcase ancient oriental antiquities, artifacts from the Islamic period, modern Syrian art, and space for temporary exhibitions. The architectural and thematic extensions reflected a dedication to providing visitors with a comprehensive exploration of Syria's diverse cultural legacy. The subsequent extension in 1963 marked a significant milestone, introducing three double halls dedicated to the Islamic period, a state-of-the-art lecture hall designed to replicate a 19th-century Damascene reception hall, and a library. These additions not only expanded the museum's physical footprint but also enhanced its educational and cultural outreach. In 1974, the museum experienced further growth, this time focusing on the Palaeolithic period, demonstrating a commitment to representing the entirety of Syria's historical timeline.⁶⁸

The most recent transformation occurred in 2004 when the temporary exhibition wing was converted into a permanent collection space dedicated to Neolithic antiquities. This evolution reflects the museum's adaptive approach to presenting artifacts in a cohesive and immersive manner. Presently, the National Museum of Damascus encompasses various sections, each dedicated to a distinct period, including Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Ancient Syrian Oriental, Classical, Islamic, and Modern Arts. Collectively, these sections weave together a tapestry of Syria's past, providing visitors with an extensive and nuanced understanding of the country's cultural evolution. The National Museum remains a cornerstone of cultural preservation and

⁶³ INTERNET ARCHIVE: *Syrian People's Assembly*, 2020.

⁶⁴ A 13th-century school building located in Damascus, Syria.

⁶⁵ A Syrian desert castle located 80 km south-west of Palmyra on the Damascus road.

⁶⁶ A major building-complex located on the banks of the Barada River was built on the ruins of Qasr al-Ablaq by the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman I.

⁶⁷ MUSEUM WITH NO FRONTIERS: *MWNF PARTNERS Complete Listing, National Museum of Damascus*. Online, 2023. <https://www.museumwnf.org/partner.php?id=Mus01;sy&theme=ISL&tye=museum> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

⁶⁸ BRITANNICA: *National Museum of Damascus*, Online, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Museum-Damascus-Syria> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

dissemination, a testament to Syria's enduring commitment to safeguarding its historical identity amid the challenges of time.⁶⁹

V.3.c) Virtual Museum of Syria – Mirath Initiative

Syria's antiquities and artifacts are not only integral to the global human heritage but also hold immense significance in the collective memory of the Syrian people, showcasing the diverse history of Syrian society. The imperative to protect these cultural treasures and ensure their neutrality from conflicts is emphasized as a shared responsibility. The Virtual Museum introduces an initiative, designed to inventory Syria's museum collections and showcase significant artifacts online. The Virtual Museum of Syria includes the National Museum of Damascus, the National Museum of Palmyra, the National Museum of Aleppo, the National Museum of as-suwayda, the National Museum of Deir ez-Zor, the National Museum of Tartus, the National Museum of Hama, the National Museum of Idlib, and the National Museum of Homs.⁷⁰

The project's primary objectives include addressing gaps in both in-country and public records of these collections, fostering awareness among the Syrian public about their shared heritage, and contributing to peace-building efforts. Acknowledging the dedication of scholars worldwide who have devoted themselves to studying and revealing Syria's heritage, the project extends an open invitation for academics to contribute to the content, either by providing relevant references or literature on specific museum items. The initiative is affiliated with the Mirath Initiative for Cultural Heritage, a nonprofit organization based in the United States, emphasizing its independence from any governmental or non-governmental entities. The material presented in the project is the culmination of 16 years of data collection during guiding and lecturing activities at various Syrian archaeological museums.⁷¹ Cultural diplomacy has become a vital pillar of Syria's effort to rebuild identity, enhance soft power, and reconnect with the global community.

VI. Conclusion

Cultural diplomacy is increasingly recognized worldwide as an effective tool to achieve diverse goals. In Hungary, the government, like many others globally, pursues a dual objective: promoting the country's culture and achieving specific objectives. Notable examples of cultural diplomacy manifest across three sectors: public, private, and civil. In the public sector, Hungary strategically spreads its culture and language through institutions like *Collegium Hungaricum*,⁷² or the *Liszt Institute*. Private companies, such as the *International Visegrad Fund*,⁷³ support cultural diplomacy indirectly by providing platforms for cultural exchange. In the civil sector,

⁶⁹ APOLLO: THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE: *What does the reopening of the National Museum of Damascus mean for Syria?*, Online, 2018. <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/national-museum-damascus-syria-reopening/> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

⁷⁰ AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME: *Virtual Museum of Syria*. Online, 2023. <https://www.aarome.org/syria-virtual-museum-syria> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

⁷¹ MIRATH INITIATIVE: *Virtual Museum of Syria*, Online, 2023. <https://virtual-museum-syria.org/about/> (Accessed: 2024. 12. 05.).

⁷² Under the auspices of Hungarian foreign representations (the Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna), the *Hungarian Cultural Institute*, has been the most significant mediator of Hungarian culture, education, and science in Austria since 1920.

⁷³ The sole institution of Visegrad cooperation, the *International Visegrad Fund*, aims to enhance collaboration among the Visegrad Group (V4) countries. It achieves this by providing support for grant projects spanning common cultural, scientific, and educational initiatives, fostering youth exchanges, encouraging cross-border cooperation and tourism promotion, and granting scholarships and artist residencies.

organizations like *Krétakör*⁷⁴ focus on cultural diplomacy for Hungarians beyond the country's borders.⁷⁵

Cultural diplomacy is a key driver in shaping Syria's global image and cultivating relationships with other nations. With a rich cultural heritage spanning millennia, Syria stands out as a distinctive participant in the field of cultural diplomacy. Utilizing assets like ancient archaeological sites, historic landmarks, traditional arts, and literature, Syria actively connects with the global community. A distinctive feature of Syria's cultural diplomacy lies in its focus on soft power, leveraging the ability to influence through attraction rather than coercion. Through the presentation of its cultural wealth, Syria seeks to cultivate favorable perceptions and establish connections that transcend political boundaries. Cultural institutions, museums, and educational initiatives play a crucial role in fostering a deeper appreciation for Syria's history, values, and traditions within the global community.

Hungary's cultural diplomacy extends to its diaspora, neighboring countries, and beyond, fostering cultural exchanges. Historical challenges, including an inferiority complex, have transformed with Hungary's transition to democracy and EU entry in 2004, offering new avenues for international cultural diplomacy. As Hungary embraces its modern era, it can proudly showcase its culture globally, strengthening national identity. However, the rapid growth of Hungary's cultural sector lacks sufficient government support. To sustain cultural projects, the government should establish a yearly plan and standardized regulations for funding cultural organizations. Despite these challenges, Hungary is making strides, evident in the expansion of cultural houses worldwide.⁷⁶ Syria encounters other types of difficulties as Hungary, however in the face of persistent challenges arising from ongoing conflicts, Syria maintains a steadfast dedication to safeguarding and showcasing its cultural legacy. Engaging in international collaborations, cultural exchanges, and participating in events like art exhibitions and festivals play a pivotal role in presenting a nuanced portrayal of Syria. These initiatives are aimed at countering negative narratives and cultivating an understanding and appreciation for the country's rich and diverse cultural heritage.

Room for improvement exists for both countries, with potential markets in former relations. For Hungary strengthening ties with Eastern states would reduce dependence on Western support. The strained relations with Hungary's substantial Roma population could benefit from cultural diplomacy to foster integration and improve relations. Through cultural exchanges, Hungary can build robust relations with culturally rich nations, leading to economic and political ties. In conclusion, cultural diplomacy is a powerful tool for Hungary to connect, exchange, and build relationships with other nations. As Hungary continues on this trajectory, it has the potential to emerge as a significant cultural diplomatic force.⁷⁷ In parallel with Hungary's efforts to strengthening national identity whilst maintaining cultural diversity, Syria's cultural diplomacy serves as a bridge for fostering mutual understanding, promoting dialogue, and building relationships on the basis of shared cultural heritage. It highlights the resilience of the Syrian people and their commitment to preserving their identity amid challenging circumstances. For further comparison I collected key aspects that determine each country's cultural diplomacy.

Hungary's Cultural Diplomacy:

1. *Focus on Europe:* Hungary, being a European nation, has historically focused its cultural diplomacy efforts on European countries, particularly within the European Union. Its membership in the EU has facilitated cultural exchanges and collaborations.

⁷⁴ *Krétakör* is a contemporary art center and production office that creates creative community games using the experiences of social sciences. The organization primarily produces performing and media arts projects.

⁷⁵ BOZÓKI, 2006. 10. p.

⁷⁶ BOZÓKI, 2006. 11. p.

⁷⁷ INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: *What is Cultural Diplomacy?*. 2011, 22-24. pp.

2. *Diaspora Engagement*: Hungary has been actively engaging with its diaspora communities, especially those in neighboring countries. Efforts include supporting Hungarian cultural events and institutions abroad.
3. *International Collaborations*: Hungary participates in various international cultural collaborations and events. It has cultural centers and institutes in different parts of the world, contributing to the global promotion of Hungarian arts and culture.
4. *Language Barrier*: The Hungarian language, spoken by a relatively small population, poses a challenge for broader international outreach. Efforts are made to overcome this through translation and cultural exchange programs.

Syria's Cultural Diplomacy:

1. *Historical Richness*: Syria has a rich historical and cultural heritage that spans millennia. Its cultural diplomacy often emphasizes showcasing its historical contributions to art, literature, and science.
 2. *Challenges due to Conflict*: The ongoing conflict in Syria has significantly impacted cultural diplomacy efforts. Destruction of cultural sites, displacement of populations, and loss of artifacts, and having a new government have presented challenges.
 3. *International Recognition*: Despite the challenges, Syria seeks to maintain international cultural ties. Efforts include participating in international forums, exhibitions, and collaborations to showcase its cultural resilience.
 4. *Preservation of Heritage*: Syria places importance on the preservation of its cultural heritage, even in the face of adversity. Efforts to document and protect historical sites contribute to its cultural diplomacy narrative.
 5. *Language and Diversity*: Arabic is the primary language in Syria, and the country's cultural diplomacy often involves promoting Arabic literature, arts, and language.
- Syria's diverse cultural and ethnic makeup adds to the richness of its diplomatic efforts.

It's important to note that the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy depends on various factors, including political contexts, international relations, and the socio-economic conditions of the respective countries, and the work of cultural institutions are key components of keeping strong international ties by using tools of soft power. I believe that cultural diplomacy and soft power are crucial determinants of international relations, that are sometimes underestimated. The protection and international legal regulation of cultural diversity can significantly contribute to the establishment of strong international and diplomatic relations between states, which is essential for maintaining global peace, security, and stability. There is a need to place greater emphasis on the respect and protection of each other's traditions and cultural heritage, which, in my opinion, should also be reflected in international relations.

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