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### Cultural Diplomacy: The Case of France

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## Cultural Diplomacy: The Case of France<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Cultural diplomacy has been evolved as a powerful and effective tool in order to ameliorate a country's image to the international audience. Consequently, it gives the opportunity for countries to promote foreign policy's goals and to achieve a standing in the international system. The present paper, after attempting to define the notion of cultural diplomacy, focuses on the case of France. In fact, some important actors that are part of the French cultural network are mentioned. In particular, actors related to the fields of language, education, cinema and media are explored in this policy brief. It is concluded that France has followed a successful cultural diplomacy policy that can inspire other countries.

**Keywords:** Cultural diplomacy, soft power, French language, Francophonie, culture, media, cinema, French cultural network.

### Introduction

Culture can be used as a foreign policy tool in the context of soft power and in fact it can be proven to be an effective one. This is the reason why in the past few decades, more and more countries understand that cultural diplomacy can play a vital role. This means that with the spread of their culture and their values, they have the opportunity to influence others, improve their image, achieve foreign policy goals, expand their presence in the international arena and increase their prestige (Eschapasse, 2017). Although the term “cultural diplomacy” is considered to be a new one that emerged in the 1990s (Ang et al., 2015), evidence of its practice can be traced back to antiquity, through the exchange of gifts between rulers for example (Auwers, 2013). The case of China is a striking example of the power of cultural diplomacy. China has managed to reintroduce itself to the global audience and advance its foreign policy goals by promoting its rich culture (Papachristou, 2021).

France is a country that has long understood the power and the benefits cultural diplomacy can bring, especially for countries with a long history and rich cultural heritage. Moreover, France, in order not to lose its influence after its withdrawal from its former colonies, sought to contrast its cultural influence. For this reason, the French Republic seeks to highlight the greatness of its glorious past, its contribution to the arts and its humanitarian values. It has indeed achieved to cultivate influence

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with effectiveness. Thus, the increase of French language and culture has become a priority and this can be proved by the large cultural network the country has created (Turbet Delof, 2018).

The aim of this paper is to analyze France's cultural diplomacy and the network the country has built, focusing particularly on the fields of education, language and cinema. First of all, some basic definitions will be given for a better understanding. Secondly, the actions and missions of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and other players that are part of this broad network and support this type of diplomacy, will be mentioned. Lastly, an overall evaluation of France's cultural diplomacy is presented.

### **Basic Definitions**

Firstly, before analyzing the case of France, it is vital to explore cultural diplomacy in general. Although, there is no commonly accepted definition on this term (Zamorano, 2016), some definitions will be given in order to understand its meaning, its substance and its characteristics. We can simply define cultural diplomacy as the exercise of diplomacy through culture. But, in order to fully comprehend the term, it is necessary to examine the definitions of the notions that constitute it.

According to UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) "culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and belief".

As far as the second term of cultural diplomacy is concerned, Hedley Bull (1977: 156) defines diplomacy as "the conduct of relations between states and other entities with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means". It can also be added that diplomacy is a way of conducting foreign policy.

In advance, speaking of cultural diplomacy, it is useful to mention the work of Joseph Nye, who is the founder of the concept of "soft power". Nye (2004) makes the distinction between hard and soft power. On the one hand, hard power relies basically on military and economic power factors and uses instruments of constraint and coercion. It is considered to be the more traditional and historically accepted form of power for international relations, since military and economic might often get others to change their position. It can also be added that hard power is a command power that rests on inducements (economic carrots) or threats (military sticks) (Simon, 2009). On the other hand, a country can obtain the outcomes it desires using soft power. This type of power is the ability of a country to shape others' preferences in a more indirect way (Nye, 2004). It is often called co-optive

power since it rests on the attractiveness of a country's culture and values or the ability to shape the agenda of political choices. It is developed using positive means of persuasion for the achievement of foreign policy goals and it has three resources, culture, political values and foreign policies. Thus, in a globalized world, soft power can be very useful for a country since it can get what it desires just because others admire it and are influenced by it. This is the reason why, in the context of soft power, cultural diplomacy is very important.

### **French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs' policy**

France gives great importance to cultural diplomacy. The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) has adopted a policy with the aim to strengthen the cultural scope of France and increase the country's attractiveness (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, 2021). Its main goal is to achieve to promote France's cultural model by the spreading of work in different areas such as cinema, music, fashion, performing arts, literature and others. These actions are supported by the cultural agency of this Ministry but also by local Instituts Français and Alliances Françaises, entities that will be mentioned below. At the same time, MEAE's policy tries to prioritize cultural and creative industries and organizations dedicated to exporting cultural sectors, as they constitute vital sectors for the French economy, they create jobs and they "advertise" French expertise. This analyzed policy of the Ministry is completely in line with priorities of soft diplomacy in general and economic diplomacy as well.

### **Players in French cultural action abroad in the fields of Culture, Education and French language**

#### **A. French broadcast media**

The presence of French broadcasting and media is aligned with priorities related to soft diplomacy. For this reason, France Médias Monde and its subsidiary Canal France International (CFI) play a central role and are essential for the global diplomacy of France. Among others, France Médias Monde's objectives include the promotion of French language and Francophonie while having a presence globally.

France Médias Monde consists of the news channel France 24, the international radio station Radio France Internationale and the Arabic-language radio station Monte Carlo Doualiya (France Médias Monde, n.d.). France 24, which broadcasts 24/7 in four languages, French, Arabic, English and Spanish, gives a French perspective on global affairs. RFI (Radio France Internationale) is a French news and current affairs public radio station that broadcasts worldwide in 16 languages, including

French, on different FM frequencies, and also on the internet and apps. Monte Carlo Doualiya is a French radio station that broadcasts in Arabic on FM but it is also accessible via its website. It provides news bulletins and magazines, while having a focus on culture, live broadcasts, conviviality and interaction. The three media combined attract millions of viewers and listeners and furthermore millions of followers on their social media accounts. It is important to mention that with their digital platforms, they have the capacity to reach a wider audience.

CFI was founded in 1989 with the cultural aim to supply for free foreign television stations with French television programs (CFI Media Development, n.d.). Its role is to actively promote the development of the media in the countries of Africa, the Arab world and South-East Asia. It is funded primarily by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs which tasked CFI to assist with the coordination of French media professionals involved in cooperation initiatives. In advance, CFI works with media organizations and the civil society in order to support the former (TV, radio, print media, online media) and to promote objectives of sustainable development.

TV5Monde Group is also a media promoting Francophonie. It aims to allow users to discover French content online with its digital platform and to promote French-speaking culture and creation in all its forms (TV5 Monde, n.d.). It has 8 general, cultural, French-speaking channels and two thematic channels (children and art of living). TV5MONDE is the official operator of the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF). Its distribution is thus guaranteed in the Member States.

## **B. French cultural network**

France has developed one of the richest and most extensive cultural networks in the world thanks to which the country can maintain and strengthen its influence. This network consists of many players, and most specifically of 137 cooperation and cultural action services, 96 French institutes with 135 branches, more than 800 Alliances Françaises and also French schools around the world (France Diplomacy, 2021). The network that France has created contributes positively to the image of the country and its culture. This is the reason why it plays a vital role in French diplomacy.

### **Institut Français**

French institutes as cultural centers were introduced from the beginning of the 20th century. However, the Institut Français was created as a public institution on January 1st, 2011 with the aim to promote French culture and be a main contributor to France's cultural diplomacy (France Diplomacy, 2015). It acts under the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE) and the Ministry of Culture. Its mission is to project the country's soft power, broaden its influence and encourage the dialogue between countries (France Diplomacy, 2019). Among its initiatives, it organizes Festivals, it spreads

French films and it shares the work of French creators. The French Institutes and their actions are directly attached to French embassies. The coordination of the various French cultural institutes around the world until 2011 was possible thanks to an association called “CulturesFrance” (Le point, 2017).

### **Alliance Française**

The Alliance Française was founded in Paris in 1883 in order to make French language and literature popular abroad, mainly in the colonies. The first board of directors that was set up in 1884, consisted of prominent personalities, such as Louis Pasteur and Jules Verne (Fondation des Alliances Françaises, n.d.).

It is now present in 137 countries across the world (France Diplomacy, 2021). It has three important missions: offer French language lessons, spread French and Francophone cultures and promote cultural diversity (Fondation des Alliances Françaises, n.d.). In 2007 the Fondation Alliance Française was created in order to coordinate better and support the activities of all the Alliances that are part of the network (Fondation des Alliances Françaises, n.d.). The Fondation des Alliances Françaises ensures the granting and withdrawal of the Alliance Française label to associations that promote French and Francophone cultures, as well as the protection and promotion of the Alliance Française brand. It also provides expertise and advice by sending experts to different countries. Although the foundation is subsidized by the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE), it is not dependent on the Ministry. The Alliances rest independent local associations.

### **C. Agency for French Education Abroad (AEFE)**

Education can become an asset and contribute to a country's attractiveness. France has long understood this potential and has achieved to create the largest educational network in the world with 552 schools in 138 countries (AEFE, n.d.). AEFE is a public institution supervised by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was founded in 1990 with the mission to monitor the French schools abroad. It is subsidized by public funds and tuition fees. The Agency manages all resources that the government provides for the French schools abroad and recruits, pays, provides training and reviews the performance of the teachers. It also gives the opportunity for financial assistance and scholarships in order to aid families fund their kids' tuition (France Diplomacy, 2019). Finally, AEFE created in 2012 the seal “LabelFrancÉducation” given to public and private foreign schools that promote French language and culture.

Schools that belong to the AEFE network provide a high-quality education to French children that live outside France and promote French language and culture while respecting the culture of the host

country and cultural diversity as well. The teaching complies with the rules set by the French educational system but tries to adapt to the realities of the host country (AEFE, n.d.). France has achieved, since the schools accept children from other nationalities as well, to expand the influence of its culture and its language and improve the appeal of French education and France's image in general. In this way, the AEFE network supports the mission of French diplomacy.

#### **D. Campus France**

Campus France is the agency which promotes French higher education to foreign students and facilitates international mobility (Campus France, n.d.). It is supervised by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. Campus France has 256 offices with representatives of the agency, situated in 125 countries. Its mission is to support foreign students and researchers before their departure for France and during their stays, organize promotional events and manage scholarships from the French and foreign governments. It is also responsible for the France Alumni platform, which is managed by embassies and helps foreign alumni to maintain ties with France and consult job offers (France Diplomacy, 2019).

In addition, the AEFE network has certainly achieved to enhance the appeal of French higher education institutions as well.

#### **E. Francophonie**

The spread of the French language constitutes a top priority for French diplomacy, which tries to popularize the language and make French one of the main world languages (France Diplomacy, 2021). In fact, French is the fifth most spoken language in the world, the second most used in diplomacy and the fourth most used on the Internet. France also advocates the use of French in international institutions, especially in the European Union. Besides, French is used by international organizations such as the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee. On 20 March 2018, International Day of the Francophonie, President Emmanuel Macron presented France's international strategy for the French language and multilingualism and characterized French language as "a language world, a language archipelago". Thus, it is obvious that for France the promotion of its language and Francophonie is a vehicle for diplomacy to broaden the country's influence (France Diplomacy, 2021).

Moreover, it is an undeniable fact that the term "Francophonie" is widely known. Francophonie has two meanings. First of all, it refers to all the people who use the French language. According to the last report of the Observatory of the French language published in 2018, there are 300 million French speakers across the world (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, n.d.). This Observatory



publishes every four years its report concerning the French language, a real tool when it comes to learn precise information about French's usages and the language's presence in different areas such as economy, media and culture. But Francophonie is also an institution and political community. The International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF) which was created in 1970, brings together 88 states and governments, either as members or as observers. Its missions are to promote French language and cultural diversity, to contribute to peace, democracy and human rights, to support education, training and research and to boost economic cooperation in the context of sustainable development (Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, n.d.). OIF implements its projects with the help of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie and four other agencies: TV5MONDE, the University Agency for Francophonie, the International Association of Francophone Mayors and Senghor University in Alexandria (France Diplomacy, 2021).

### **Cultural Diplomacy and Cinema**

Cinema can serve cultural diplomacy as it is characterized as a means with influence and accessibility to the masses, since it can reach a wide audience. Films have the power to educate and break stereotypes and they play an important role in how a country and its people are perceived abroad (Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, n.d.). France is famous for its contribution to the seventh art and the country is one of the biggest film exporters (Unifrance, n.d.). It is also known for famous award ceremonies such as the Cannes Film Festival, renowned directors and actors. Furthermore, festivals of French cinema are organized every year in different countries, including Greece.

The French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs also supports organizations that export cultural sectors and support soft diplomacy. The Unifrance association, which is responsible for promoting French cinema and audiovisual content throughout the world, is one of the organizations that the ministry subsidizes (France Diplomacy, 2021). The association that was created in 1949, initially named AFDEC (Association Française de Diffusion et d'Expansion Cinématographique), has nearly 1000 members from the film industry, from producers and exporters to actors and authors. Unifrance has carried out studies of international markets, offer expertise, accompanies French films abroad, organizes events and is part of many international festivals (Unifrance, n.d.).

### **The case of France as an example for other countries**

As it was explained above, France has given importance on developing its cultural diplomacy policy. Other countries should take France's case as an example and an inspiration in order to create a network of active players that support this effective type of diplomacy. They have to take into



consideration that in the modern, globalized world, cultural diplomacy can have a dynamic role. It contributes to the development of a positive attitude towards the country and to a broader appeal of its values. Thus, globalization is a factor that countries can take advantage of, since it permits the flow of people, information and ideas. To be more specific, some recommendations will be given to countries to reinforce their cultural diplomacy, based on the French model.

As seen in the case of France, the government has the forefront role to organize its cultural diplomacy and coordinate the action of all the actors, most of which are public. Cultural diplomacy is traditionally state-driven, since its primary goal is the promotion of national interests. Thus, countries should be responsible to develop, support, administrate and finance cultural diplomacy's policy. Moreover, they have to build an active network that can support this type of policy and engage a wide range of non-governmental actors, such as teachers, students, actors and journalists.

Cultural Institutes abroad also have a considerable role. Everyone is familiar with the British Council, the French Institute, the German Goethe Institute and the Italian Institute Dante Alighieri. Other countries should imitate this effort in order to promote their language, their values and their image abroad by organizing film festivals, language courses and a number of events. Of course, there are countries, such as Greece, with difficulty in learning the language but with a long history and a rich civilization. In this case, institutes should focus on highlighting culture. Also, rising forces must seize the opportunity offered by the institutes, which have been transformed to a form of national representation. For example, since its foundation in 2004, the Confucius Institute has contributed greatly to the impressive rise of Chinese learning internationally. In addition, supporting foreign language learning can enhance the world's cultural diversity, build understanding of other cultures and assist international cooperation and dialogue.

Finally, following the example of the French Republic, countries should invest in education. Since it is not easy to change the mindset of people, education can foster a generation with favorable opinions towards a country and its population. For this reason, it can be fruitful to attract foreign students to higher education institutions, to arrange educational exchange programmes or even fund scholarships. Also, countries with expatriate communities outside their national space, can create schools in order for them not to lose touch with their country and their language.

## Conclusions

France has indeed given a great importance into the development of its cultural diplomacy that is perceived to be a vehicle to outreach its influence. Its culture, its values, its language and the network it has created affect the country's position and permit it to still play an important role at an

international level. According to the report “Soft Power 30” that took into consideration many factors, such as culture, language, cooking, education and art, France was the most influential country in terms of soft power (USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2019). As a consequence, the attractiveness of the French Republic is undeniable. Millions of tourists visit the country every year to taste its culture, lifestyle and cuisine, its museums are some of the most visited in the world and French is a language that many people want to learn.

However, in order to maintain its position, France has to be very strategic in how it manages its cultural network. It is of course a challenge, that includes - among others - economic factors, to coordinate all the organizations and initiatives that promote and publicize the culture abroad (France Muséums, n.d.). Moreover, the sanitary crisis has had some serious consequences. French Institutes and Alliances Françaises around the world had ceased their activity and consequently there was a decrease in the number of French language students (Sénat, 2020). Also, competition in the area of cultural diplomacy will forever exist, either from historic actors such as the United States, Italy and the United Kingdom or by new actors such as South Korea. For instance, Hollywood is by far a giant cinematic force compared to the French film industry.

Lastly, it is always possible for France to evolve its soft power through cultural diplomacy. For example, with Brexit the role of the French language within the European Union can increase. Also, France can take advantage of the new technology and diffuse its culture through new mediums. This was largely achieved since the institutes managed to hold online events and continue their language courses online.

In conclusion, culture plays a vital role in the exercise of foreign policy and in international relations. The French Republic has achieved to cultivate its cultural diplomacy and as a consequence the policy it follows can be characterized as successful.

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