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SOFT POWER À LA FRANÇAISE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the early 1990s, the term “soft power” was introduced by J. Nye. In his writing, he defined soft power as the ability to shape the preferences of others in accordance with one’s interests through the means of attraction [Nye URL]. Soft power, therefore, is opposed to hard power, and the definition itself points to some of its distinguishing features: first, for the successful application of soft power, it is necessary that the object of influence should recognise the actions of the subject as legitimate and attractive; besides, in J. Nye's concept soft power is usually based on intangible resources. In the case of a state, the scholar identifies culture, political values and foreign policy as sources of soft power; however, according to J. Nye, soft power is not the absolute prerogative of states — NGOs, civil society and other non-state actors have an important role to play.

It should be noted that the phenomenon behind the term “soft power” existed long before the term was coined and it has been conceptualised by scholars from various countries. In France, for example, a kind of forerunner of soft power, so-called cultural diplomacy, emerged as early as the late 19th century.

As E. Adleiba and V. Sakaev note, the systematic development of cultural institutions in France began when the country lost the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871). At that time, France could not engage in another war to reverse the losses incurred, but it had a solid cultural potential. That is why an attempt was made to transform the role of culture in the context of diplomacy. It is no coincidence that during this period the word “Francophonie” came into use, and in 1883 the Alliance Française was created with the aim of spreading the French language around the world and promoting intercultural dialogue [François URL]. The organization exists and develops up to this day, so does the concept of cultural diplomacy.

As part of cultural diplomacy, we distinguish science diplomacy. While the former is mainly the responsibility of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, the French Ministry of Culture, and the affiliated institutions, when it comes to the latter, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research also has an important role to play.

The French approach to the phenomenon of science diplomacy was officially outlined in 2013 in the report “Science Diplomacy for France”, and since then the MFA has revised the strategic guidelines every year.

In addition, there are special Departments for Science and Technology

operating in five countries (Russia, Germany, Japan, the USA, the UK) under the auspices of the French Embassy and since 2010, France has had an ambassador for science, technology and innovation, whose task includes promoting French science internationally. It is worth noting that the French network of science diplomats abroad is extensive and is made up of 5 science advisors, 71 science attachés and 70 junior officers, working in 62 countries [Krasnova, Shakirov, Solovyov, Reinhardt URL].

As for other institutions of science diplomacy, The French National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre national de la recherche scientifique, CNRS) is one of the most important. The French Research Institutes Abroad (Les Instituts français de recherche à l'étranger) have been operating under its auspices since 2007 to maintain links between French and foreign universities and research institutions. [Shestopal, Litvak URL].

In general, the objectives of French science diplomacy include ensuring the country's presence at international platforms for discussing global problems of humanity, spreading the country's influence through the activities of research centres, supporting innovations created by French companies, and involving the scientific community in research for development.

As P. Ruffini notes, science diplomacy includes two components: 1) “diplomacy for science”, which aims to increase mobility of scientific personnel, attract prospective foreign scientists and support international communication in science, and 2) “science for diplomacy”, which aims to help the country achieve its geopolitical goals.

A relatively new concept that is now developing in parallel to the concept of cultural diplomacy is the concept of diplomacy of influence. Its emergence is primarily associated with the end of the Cold War. As P. Jaubert points out, during this period the bipolar system in international relations ceased to exist, the world of diplomacy returned to multilateralism, and France, which used to balance between the two poles, got an opportunity to have a greater influence on world politics, thus, there was a need to develop new concepts, strategies and new tools of influence.

In the work “France's Strategy for Cultural Influence Abroad” P. Jaubert defines influence as “the ability of actors, both state and non-state, to ensure that their views or interests gain advantage through indirect and non-coercive means”, that is, as the ability to obtain external support without using coercion to do so. In turn, a strategy of influence, in his view, consists of “a complex combination of actions taken directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly with regard to individuals, communities, organisations and/or states to gain credibility and superiority so that, ultimately, the target of influence makes decisions beneficial to the actor” [Jaubert URL].

It should be noted that, instead of “soft power”, the term “diplomacy of influence” has become part of official discourse and, according to C. Lequesne, the dissemination of the term in diplomatic circles was facilitated by the events

known as the Arab revolutions in the early 10s of the 21st century. It is in this context that the term comes into use to emphasise the importance of maintaining a dialogue with the societies of the southern Mediterranean coast [Lequesne URL].

However, the term itself appears even earlier, in 2008, in the White Paper on French Foreign and European Policy as an expression close in meaning to the American term “soft power” and at the same time broader in meaning than the traditional cultural influence policy which forms the basis of cultural diplomacy [Gazeau-Secret URL] — in contrast to cultural diplomacy, diplomacy of influence has a more diversified range of objectives and extends to a broader scope of action.

At the same time, France does not abandon cultural diplomacy: the new budget programme 185 is entitled “Cultural Diplomacy and Diplomacy of Influence” since 2010 and deals with cultural, linguistic, educational, academic and scientific activities, i.e. the areas reflecting the strength of French policy of influence [Gazeau-Secret URL].

Nevertheless, the concept of soft power itself has also received some attention from French researchers. For instance, F. Martel has pointed out that the concept is very “North American” in its essence and is not always suitable to describe the experience of other countries. Even J. Nye illustrates the subtleties of the concept mainly on the example of the United States and does not hide the fact that he conducted his research largely in order to find an appropriate solution to American foreign policy problems.

F. Martel believes that the concept of soft power does not fully describe French policy in this area and, like many other French scholars, prefers to use the term “diplomacy of influence”. He explains this as follows: soft power is based on the phenomenon of attraction, which is still narrower in meaning than influence, which can be the result of application of economic and military means.

However, it should be clarified that, in J. Nye's concept, soft power relies on intangible resources (culture and values) and on non-coercive methods (hence, threats and payments are excluded), but most importantly, the object of influence must perceive the subject's actions as attractive and legitimate. Thus, theoretically, if a state has a significant military potential (but does not use it) and another state finds that fact attractive enough to form an alliance with the first state, then it can be said that, although military force is a source of hard power, in this situation it is also a source of soft power. J. Nye does not clearly explain this phenomenon, but this point of view is widespread, especially, among scholars who work within the framework of political realism. As to the economic means of influence, it is not only sanctions but also the attractiveness of the economic model. From this perspective, the French term “diplomacy of influence” and the American term “soft power” can be used synonymously.

Thus, we have considered several terms that in one way or another

describe phenomena related to soft power. If a gradation from the narrowest term to the broadest is used, it is as follows: science diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, soft power, diplomacy of influence. Diplomacy of influence is the last one listed because some researchers, e.g. M. Foucher, include in its scope military force and the ability to use it [Racouchot URL]. In this case it seems possible to conclude that diplomacy of influence is a synthesis of soft and hard power.

In our study of French soft power, we consider cultural and science diplomacy as part of soft power as understood by J. Nye, and we also include in soft power the phenomena that fall under the concept of “diplomacy of influence” except for those that have to do with military means and coercive methods. In other words, our study was conducted within the framework of neoliberalism.

We applied a structural approach to the study of French soft power; that is, we studied soft power in terms of its constituent elements. The elements of soft power are soft power resources, soft power channels (institutions), soft power instruments, and soft power subjects and objects. With regard to the latter two, in our study, both subjects and objects are states, with France as the subject.

France as a soft power actor has a solid potential. French scholars have rightly pointed out that the foundation of the country's soft power is its culture and its rich historical heritage, which is actively studied abroad and also attracts tourists from all over the world. It is appropriate to highlight the French language as a source of soft power, since it is still the lingua franca in many former French colonies, and the official working language of many international organisations, such as the UN, the UNESCO, the ILO, the WHO, the EU, the NATO, the Council of Europe, etc. France's membership in international organisations itself can be considered a soft power source because international organizations are the platforms where the process of agenda-setting takes place. Higher education and science (in the context of attracting foreign students and scholars) and the country's economic model are the sources of French soft power as well.

In terms of values, i.e. the very basis of soft power, France actively supports the idea of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” and the idea of respect for human rights. As Nicolas Sarkozy said in an interview in 2006, “France must promote universal values, and the only way to do so is to live in accordance with them” [Bruckner, Glucksmann, Prazan, Reza]. France makes efforts to promote intercultural dialogue and preserve cultural diversity, which is a kind of response to “American cultural expansion” [Bokeria, Sokolova URL].

It should be noted that French soft power is well institutionalized. Public institutions such as the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the

institutes associated with them play a significant role in this domain. Besides, France's extensive diplomatic network includes 160 embassies, 2 French Cooperation Offices, 89 consulates and consulates general, and 112 consular sections of embassies [France Diplomacy URL]. In addition, the structure of the MFA includes the Directorate General for Globalisation, Development and Partnerships (Direction général de la mondialisation, du développement et des partenariats, DGM), which is directly responsible for economic diplomacy, promoting sustainable development and the dissemination of global public goods, as well as for diplomacy of influence.

The Alliance Française, Institut Français and Campus France are also worth mentioning. All of these organisations are in one way or another related to the aforementioned ministries; while the former was established in 1883, the latter two were established more recently in 2010 with Act No. 2010-873 of 27 July 2010 on the State's external action and have replaced pre-existing institutions.

As mentioned above, the Alliance Française aims to promote the French language and the intercultural dialogue around the world, similar tasks are entrusted to the Institut Français. However, while the Alliance Française centres are autonomous organisations subject to local laws, the Institut Français branches are attached directly to the French Embassy in a particular country, and despite being independent in terms of management, they have no legal personality. Today, Alliance Française has an international network of more than 800 organisations around the world, and Institut Français has more than 200. As for Campus France, it is responsible for promoting the French higher education and today it has 260 offices and branches in 126 countries.

Think tanks can also be considered as channels of French soft power. As of 2020, there are 275 think tanks in France. According to the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report (2020), France has the sixth highest number of think tanks, behind only the US, China, India, the UK and South Korea.

One of the traditional channels of soft power is the global media. In the case of French television, the most prominent example is France 24, which broadcasts in French, English and Arabic. France also has a radio station RFI which broadcasts in French and 12 other languages (English, Cambodian, Chinese, Spanish, Hausa, Swahili, Persian, Portuguese, Brazilian, Romanian, Russian and Vietnamese) [France Diplomacy URL].

Commercial entities that represent well-known brands can be channels of soft power as well, however, it should be noted that commercial companies' interests do not always coincide with the ones of the state, which makes this channel unstable.

A positive example of private sector assistance to the state is the work of the private company Culturespaces in the field of cultural heritage preservation. The company is engaged in the management of historical monuments and museums, establishment of art centres and organization of exhibitions, including

digital ones. It collaborates with foreign artists to implement large-scale projects [Pranaitye URL].

France uses a wide range of tools to realise its soft power potential. Some of the examples include scholarships and grants for foreign students, scholars and artists; cultural events; bilateral economic aid, etc. As a particular example, The Solidarity Fund for Innovative Projects can be mentioned. It is meant to support civil society, Francophonie and human development by funding relevant projects in developing countries. Other examples are The National Program for the Urgent Aid and Reception of Scientists in Exile (Programme d'aide à l'Accueil en Urgence des Scientifiques en Exil, PAUSE), initiated by the French government, which supports researchers from countries where the political situation puts their work at risk; and the Hubert Curien Partnership Programme, which is supported by the French Foreign Ministry and facilitates the mobility of scientists involved in bilateral research projects.

Nevertheless, despite its solid potential and extensive network of soft power channels, France faces a number of challenges in this area. In particular, many French researchers note that France's global soft power strategy is not deliberate enough. According to P. Jaubert, the efforts of the French political elites are aimed at defending certain values rather than the national interests of France. Considering the fact that influence is not a unilateral process, it becomes difficult to determine whether the French political elites are really promoting what is beneficial to the country or whether they themselves are being influenced [Jaubert URL]. F. Martel expresses a similar idea. The scholars believe that in order to build an effective strategy of influence, it is necessary to determine one's own interests and the framework of one's own identity. As H. Védrine notes, "To have influence you must first of all have your own ideas" [Racouchot URL].

In addition, P. Jaubert believes that France needs to pay more attention to the "customization" of its soft power efforts because each country requires an individual approach. In this respect, A. Gazeau-Secret notes that developing countries follow the principles of non-interference, partnership and equality in soft power issues and they adapt their cultural projects to local demand, whereas in France there is still a tendency to consider French / Western values and culture as universal and attractive by default. In this regard, she says that in today's world the winning strategy consists not in seeking unilateral influence and a universal culture, but in being open to the influence of others and implementing cooperative strategies [Gazeau-Secret URL].

M. Foucher expresses a similar point. In his view, influence always takes place within a specific historical and geographical context that requires innovative ideas and risk-taking initiatives, elaborating regulations and different scenarios in a collective, global effort: "To be influential today is to be a decisionmaker and to be perceived as such. It means generating ideas that will interest others" [Racouchot URL]. In this respect, France needs not only to

reconsider some of the tenets of its policy of influence, but also to cope with competition from other states, especially the US, the UK, Germany, China and Japan.

It should also be noted that the French approach to soft power differs from the American one not only on a theoretical, but also on a practical level. In J. Nye's concept, soft power is based on the activity of the civil society and the well-functioning market; the influence is indirect and the process itself is natural and almost impossible to control. The French approach, on the other hand, is based on the strong role of public institutions [Martel URL]. P. Jaubert, for example, acknowledges the importance of non-state actors, but believes that the coordinating role is still more suitable for the state. However, a certain extent of decentralization is definitely achieved: the promotion of French values and culture abroad is also conducted via non-profit organizations and the academic community, which are not always directly dependent on the state.

Another feature of France's soft power is related to the country's role as the core of the European integration process. Although the European Union currently has its own legal personality and its own soft power, France is able to achieve its foreign policy goals through this organisation, using, among other things, its soft power. As V. Nagornov notes, France takes an active part in bilateral projects financed by the EU in the countries of presence in many areas, which means that French soft power can be effectively exercised within the European Union, moreover, the strengthening of the EU external influence is particularly beneficial to France, as it is a factor of balance in its international relations [Nagornov URL].

There is one more organisation France's soft power is directly linked with, it is the International Organisation of La Francophonie. To date, it has 54 member states, 7 associate members and 27 observer members, which means that, in one way or another, the organisation unites 88 countries and supports them in developing or consolidating their policies, implementing international policies and multilateral cooperation actions according to four main objectives: 1) promoting the French language, multilingualism and cultural diversity, 2) promoting peace, democracy and human rights, 3) supporting education and research, 4) promoting economic cooperation for sustainable development. In this way, the organisation can be considered a full-fledged channel of French soft power.

It should be pointed out that many of the member countries of the Francophonie were once French colonies. France's relationship with these countries is complicated and burdened by a historical past; consequently, France uses its soft power to improve and strengthen this relationship.

However, France's strategic interest in the Maghreb countries, for example, is driven not only by cultural and historical factors, but also by economic and political ones, in particular, by the need to ensure national security, as today there is still a threat of terrorism and illegal migration

[Bokeria, Sokolova URL].

In conclusion, despite the fact that the term “soft power” itself is used in French official and academic discourse much less frequently than the closely related French term “diplomacy of influence”, the phenomenon that the terms describe undoubtedly exists in France, and the country actively uses it to achieve its foreign policy goals, employing a wide range of resources, channels and instruments. At the same time, France's theoretical and practical approach to soft power differs from the one dominant in the U.S. and the country faces a number of challenges in exercising its soft power. Nevertheless, France usually ranks high in rankings designed to evaluate countries around the world in terms of soft power. For example, in The Soft Power 30 [McClory URL], last updated in 2019, France was estimated to be the number one soft power superpower.

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