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The Role of Presidential Change in the Institutional Transformation of French Cultural Diplomacy in the 21st Century

Polina A. Voronova  **Eriks Varpahovskis**  

HSE University, Moscow, Russian Federation

 evarpahovskis@hse.ru

Abstract. Despite the growing academic interest in the field of cultural diplomacy, research of how this phenomenon evolves and transforms in one of its most prolific users, France, remains limited. A review of the literature on cultural diplomacy reveals a paucity of attention to institutional aspects, despite institutional reforms having the potential to effect transformative changes in foreign policy by altering the functionality of relevant agencies. Our study aims to close previously unaddressed research gaps and determine the relationship between the changes in presidential administration and institutional transformations in the context of cultural diplomacy. An analysis of the bureaucratic mechanisms associated with cultural diplomacy reveals that France's institutional structure for carrying out cultural diplomacy is complex and multi-layered. Given the complexity and scope of this structure, it is not feasible to examine all the transformations in one paper. Therefore, a top-down approach has been adopted, with a focus on changes at the higher echelons of power. The present study utilizes process tracing as its methodological foundation to examine the relationship between the presidential transition in France and subsequent shifts in cultural diplomacy. The study provides evidence to support two proposed hypotheses. The first hypothesis posits that the newly elected president is capable of influencing the existing mechanisms of France's cultural diplomacy. The second hypothesis indicates that these transformations occur due to discrepancies between the inherited structure of France's cultural diplomacy and the updated requirements and goals of the country's foreign policy, as well as the vision of the incumbent president or members of his team. Additionally, the study presents observations regarding the degree and scale of reforms in the context of cultural diplomacy, as well as legacy trends.

Key words: French foreign affairs, institutional transformation, presidential administration change, public diplomacy, soft power, Emmanuel Macron, François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy, Jacques Chirac

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Роль смены президента в институциональной трансформации культурной дипломатии Франции в XXI веке

П.А. Воронова , Э. Варпаховскис  

НИУ ВШЭ, Москва, Российская Федерация

 evarpahovskis@hse.ru

Аннотация. Несмотря на растущий академический интерес к проблематике культурной дипломатии, исследования, посвященные эволюции и трансформации этого явления в одной из наиболее активно практикующих его стран — Франции, остаются ограниченными. Анализ существующей литературы показывает недостаточную фокусировку на институциональных аспектах, хотя именно институциональные преобразования способны приводить к значимым изменениям во внешнеполитическом курсе, влияя на функциональность профильных государственных структур. Исследование направлено на реализацию двух целей: восполнение существующих в научном дискурсе пробелов и выявление взаимосвязи между сменой президентской администрации и институциональными трансформациями в сфере культурной дипломатии. Анализ бюрократических механизмов, задействованных в реализации культурной дипломатии, демонстрирует, что институциональная архитектура Франции в данной области отличается высокой степенью сложности и многоуровневости. Ввиду масштабности и структурной разветвленности этой системы рассмотрение всех возможных преобразований в рамках одной статьи представляется невозможным. В связи с этим используется нисходящий (*top-down*) аналитический подход, предполагающий акцент на изменениях на уровне высших органов государственной власти. Методологическую основу исследования составляет «отслеживание процесса» (*process tracing*), что позволяет проследить причинно-следственные механизмы, связывающие президентский переход с последующими институциональными сдвигами в культурной дипломатии Франции. Полученные результаты подтверждают выдвинутые гипотезы. Первая гипотеза утверждает, что вновь избранный президент способен корректировать существующие механизмы культурной дипломатии. Вторая гипотеза предполагает, что такие институциональные изменения обусловлены несоответствием между сложившейся архитектурой культурной дипломатии и обновленными целями внешней политики, а также видением действующего президента и его команды. Предложена оценка степени и направленности реформ, осуществляемых в сфере культурной дипломатии, и выявлены элементы институциональной преемственности, сохраняющиеся несмотря на политические изменения на высшем уровне.

Ключевые слова: внешняя политика Франции, институциональная трансформация, трансформация институтов, смена президентской администрации, публичная дипломатия, общественная дипломатия, мягкая сила, Эмманюэль Макрон, Франсуа Олланд, Николя Саркози, Жак Ширак

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Заявление о конфликте интересов. Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Вклад авторов. Воронова П.А.: написание, курирование данных исследования, валидация данных, редактирование рукописи, визуализация. Варпаховскис Э.: концептуализация, разработка методологии исследования, написание, редактирование рукописи. Оба автора ознакомлены с окончательной версией статьи и одобрили ее.

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Introduction

Despite the considerable interest in French foreign policy, the role of cultural diplomacy, and the significance of institutional transformations in the operation of the country's foreign policy instruments in academic and political circles, we have identified a lack of research at the intersection of these areas. The objective of this study is to ascertain the impact of the arrival of a new president in France on the institutional structure of France's cultural diplomacy. In the respective sections the paper presents a comprehensive literature review, a conceptualization of the model of transformation and key terms, a detailed methodology, and an analysis of the findings in the context of a case study of 21st-century French cultural diplomacy.

Literature Review

The literature review assesses several significant contributions to the topics under investigation. From a conceptual standpoint, it is crucial to provide a brief analysis of how scholars have come to understand and define cultural diplomacy. In 2016, Charlotte Faucher questioned the meaning of the concept itself. According to the author, promoting one's cultural values may not only maintain the status quo of national identity, but also impact global events (such as international disputes between nations), by encouraging cooperation and acceptance of diversity, and reducing tensions and misunderstandings (Faucher, 2016).

In order to answer the research question, it is also helpful to assess the literature that focuses specifically on the cultural diplomacy of France. The study by Lane (2013) claims that France's cherishing of tradition in all its forms — language,

arts, customs and so on — enables the promotion of high-level contacts that bridge cultural divides and serve as a basis for international collaboration. The scholar draws attention to the *Alliance Française* and the *Académie des Sciences* as organizations that uphold the current state of multicultural interactions (Lane, 2013). The author also emphasizes that France accords particular importance to domestic communication that supports the development of cultural values. One such example is the collaboration between ministries and arrondissements, as demonstrated by the *Quai d'Orsay*, the Ministry of Education (*Ministère de l'Education nationale*), and others (Lane, 2013).

Moreover, the article entitled "The role of governmental institutions in the context of French cultural diplomacy" authored by Giedrė Pranaitytė and published in 2014, is self-explanatory and emphasizes the significance of various governmental organizations, such as the National Centre of Cinematography and Animated Pictures, several ministries, and the network of French embassies, which also serve to support the foreign policy agenda (Pranaitytė, 2014).

To continue, it is necessary to consider the contributions of several writers on the subject of French foreign policy in relation to the president. For instance, de Charette contended that Nicolas Sárközy's top goals while in office were to solidify France's standing as a major world power by improving its relations with former African colonies, collaborating with other European Union members, and introducing unavoidable changes to the United Nations (UN) Security Council. He outlined that all of these objectives depended on cultural diplomacy (de Charette, 2008). Jean-Pierre Darnis¹ offered a similar

¹ Darnis J.-P. François Hollande's Presidency: A New Era in French Foreign Policy? IAI Working Papers. Instituto Affari Internazionali // HAL Open Science. 2012. URL: <https://hal.science/hal-03916317/document> (accessed: 02.02.2025).

assessment of François Hollande's leadership, validating the president's achievements and shortcomings.

Finally, Gomart and Hecker turned their attention to Emanuel Macron's presidency. Their work delves into Macron's understanding of foreign policy, which is being shaped by global conflicts in the Middle East. According to the authors,² Macron is regarded as someone who values international cooperation and upholds France's geopolitical role in the world. He is also said to be among the few presidents who agrees that cultural relations have become a particularly valuable tool for soft power and should be developed more carefully in order to ensure a more positive image of the country abroad (de Corte, 2019).

Furthermore, it is evident that the subject of cultural diplomacy, as handled by the French government, is of interest not just to Anglophone and Francophone writers, but also to Russian-speaking ones focusing on the role of cultural reforms (Levitskiy, 2019), including the French attempts to influence foreign regimes through culture (Kosenko, 2014), and French policies within the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Ezhov & Dhukha, 2023).

In conclusion, the extant literature demonstrates that scholars are still interested in French cultural diplomacy, both in general and in specific presidential terms. However, existing research tends to cover general

topics, resulting in a research gap regarding changes to the institutional features of French cultural diplomacy when a new president takes office.

Conceptual and Methodological Frameworks of the Study

Cultural Diplomacy

Although many of the definitions of cultural diplomacy provided by scholars are similar, certain distinctions should be noted.

Simon Mark³ and David Clarke (2020) claim that the main emphasis of cultural diplomacy is the state's foreign policy, the goals of which can be achieved by the use of cultural instruments. These include examples of "high culture," such as ballet, plays, classical literature, visual arts, and other art forms, as pointed out by the aforementioned authors. However, another important element of cultural diplomacy has recently emerged: "popular culture," which includes popular novels and films, and is understood and favored by the majority of the population.⁴

Another well-known definition of cultural diplomacy is provided by Milton Cummings, who claims that it is based on conversations between different states and their citizens, aiming for "mutual understanding" through ideas, art, customs, language, and all other aspects that represent a single country's culture.⁵ Clarke further demonstrates that

² Gomart T., Hecker M. *Macron, Diplomat. A New French Foreign Policy?* // IFRI: Institut Français des Relations Internationales. *Études de l'Ifri*. April 2018. URL: https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/gomart_hecker_macron_diplomat_new_french_foreign_policy_2018.pdf (accessed: 02.02.2025).

³ Mark S. *A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy* // Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael. *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*. 2009. No. 114. URL: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20090616_cdsp_discussion_paper_114_mark.pdf (accessed: 02.02.2025).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cummings M. *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey* // Center for Arts and Culture. 2003. URL: <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/MCCpaper.pdf> (accessed: 02.02.2025).

cultural diplomacy also includes people presenting their own “national identity” to the world (Clarke, 2020).

Patricia Goff provides another fascinating explanation of the concept. In contrast to many other authors, she distinguishes between cultural diplomacy and foreign policy, contending that the former relates to presenting a nation’s authentic identity, which might not necessarily coincide with official claims, but is necessary for establishing more robust ties with other countries (Goff, 2013).

The relationship between public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy is also explored in academic discourse. According to scholars such as Villanueva Rivas and Kim, cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy are two distinct concepts that sometimes overlap (Villanueva Rivas, 2007; Kim, 2017). Cultural diplomacy can be viewed as an integral part of public diplomacy (Popiolkowski & Cull, 2009; Varpahovskis, 2018), or alternatively as a concept that is analogous to or can be used in place of public diplomacy.⁶ It is imperative to underscore that the concept of cultural diplomacy, otherwise termed “influence diplomacy” is widely accepted among Francophone scholars and professionals (Huang & Wang, 2024), while public diplomacy becomes of secondary concern.

The definition of cultural diplomacy used in this paper was derived from the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. According to this definition, cultural diplomacy may be defined as the sharing of national accomplishments in written, visual, and audio formats with the intention of working with other countries through specific organizations both locally and globally.⁷

Institutional Transformations and Presidents

The present study aims to expand upon the theoretical framework by linking institutional transition to the role of the newly appointed president and his or her newly formed government. The question of whether institutional development is gradual or causal remains a matter of debate (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Since institutional mechanisms undergo cyclical transformation, we consider institutional change in cultural diplomacy to be both an endogenous factor that influences the circumstances that lead to further institutional transformation, and an outcome of it.

Since the role of the presidency reflects sudden changes in the administration, it can be considered an external component to be examined. The proposed model is illustrated below (Figure 1). Assumedly, innovations and changes could arise from a multitude of sources and derive the pre-existing structure, the new president and his administration, as well as other exogenous and endogenous factors that have been covered by a range of scholars (e.g., (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Destler, 2015)). The process is circular: in the subsequent cycle, an invention that was previously included into the administrative system became the “previously existing administrative system of cultural diplomacy.” This circularity is clearly demonstrated in the diagram (see Figure 1), which illustrates the relationships between the new president (and the introduction of a new government) and the institutional changes to the administrative system of cultural diplomacy in France.

⁶ Szondi G. Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael. Discussion Papers in Diplomacy. 2008. No. 105 // Diplo. URL: https://www.diplomacy.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Public_Diplomacy_and_Nation_Branding_Conceptual_Si.pdf (accessed: 02.02.2025). See also: (Signitzer & Wamser, 2006).

⁷ Cultural and Creative Industries, Key to Our Foreign Policy // Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères. October 2023. URL: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/cultural-diplomacy/cultural-and-creative-industries-key-to-our-foreign-policy/> (accessed: 02.02.2025).

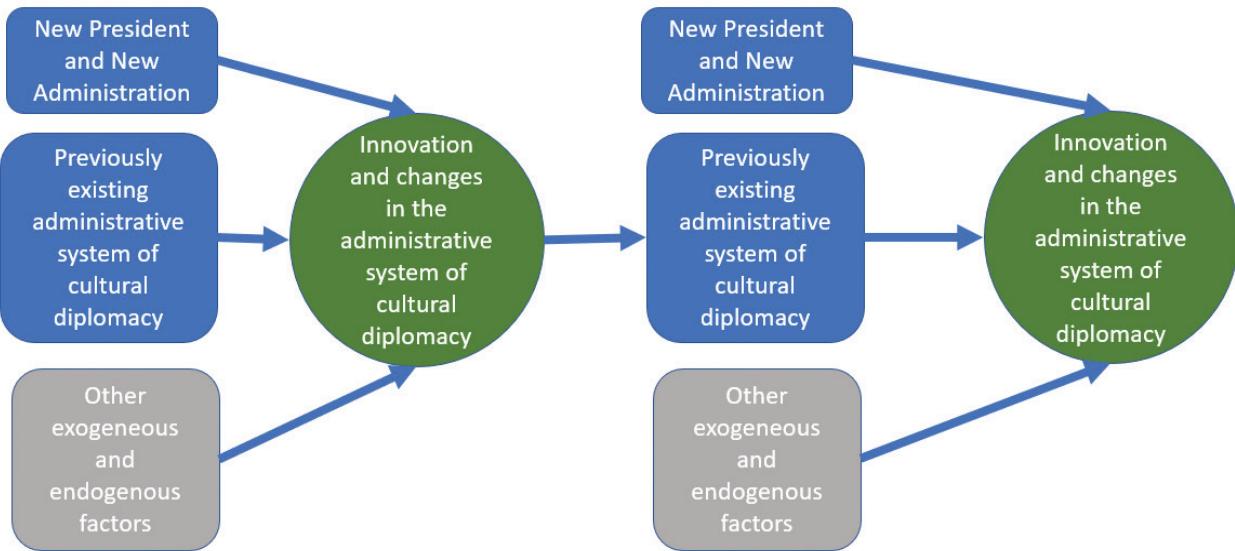


Figure 1. Circular Model of the Process of Administrative System Change in Cultural Diplomacy

Source: composed by E. Varpahovskis and P. A. Voronova.

Methodology

To address the proposed research gap our methodological framework incorporates comparative analysis (McNabb, 2015) and process-tracing (Beach & Pedersen, 2019). By comparing the administrative mechanisms of cultural diplomacy, as well as expenditures on cultural diplomacy and policies adopted during the presidencies of Nicolas Sárközy, François Hollande, and Emmanuel Macron, and partly Jacques Chirac, the present study sets out to analyze the internal mechanics and transformational patterns of the specialized government agencies.

The process-tracing method implies collecting of what is termed “diagnostic evidence” (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; Collier, 2011), which can be both qualitative and quantitative, in order to identify the influence, whether partial or otherwise, of variables and/or events on other variables and/or events within the context of the phenomenon under study. In order to assess institutional changes, such as changes in the

institution’s name or administrative structure, the focus has historically been on the modification itself rather than on its degree and significance.

The process-tracing allows us to observe not only the introduction of innovations and changes in the governance of cultural diplomacy, but also to inquire into the role of presidents in introducing these changes, and whether they can be explicitly attributed to a specific president and their administration. For instance, diagnostic evidence was found in relation to the renaming of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and its correlation with the president’s change of governance mission in 2007–2022, as well as in the evolution of state agencies with an educational focus during Nicolas Sárközy’s leadership.

It is worth mentioning that the personal impact of each president may be regarded as the most subjective criterion for tracing institutional change, given the difficulty of assessing all the internal and external factors that could have led to certain decisions. In an attempt to overcome this shortcoming, an appeal was made through

their speeches and active involvement in public events, such as the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Furthermore, while the president may not personally propose all changes related to national and foreign affairs, he serves as the ultimate authority for the approval and signing of relevant decrees. This underscores his pivotal role in driving structural and political transformation within the state.

In the context of a given study, an attempt is made to adapt the taxonomy of causation tests suggested for process-tracing (e.g., (Collier, 2011; Sevin, 2017)). This taxonomy allows for relative flexibility and room for interpretation in case of running tests for causation. To address the research question on the relationship between a new president coming to power in France and the institutional transformations of cultural diplomacy, the theorized model (see Figure 1) is employed, and two hypotheses are proposed:

H1. The new president's rise to power leads to transformations in the institutional mechanisms of France's cultural diplomacy.

H2. The shortcomings of the innovations previously introduced to France's cultural diplomacy lead to transformations in its institutional mechanisms.

The null hypotheses for H1 and H2 posit an absence of relationships between the variables under study.

In terms of data, we use both qualitative and quantitative data that is publicly available online. Some numerical data, especially in the financial sphere, had to be neglected as the approach to its gathering altered over the period of time from 2007 to 2022, which did not allow for consistent comparative analysis. Predominantly, the sources of data are reports and official statements by the ministries (e.g., the Ministry for Europe and

Foreign Affairs (*Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères*),⁸ the Ministry of Culture (*Ministère de la culture*),⁹ and agencies in charge of cultural diplomacy-related activities (e.g., *Institut Français*, and *Alliance Française*). In the following research, the reports from the above-mentioned institutions serve as the primary sources based on which were traced most of the policy changes. Additionally, data from official websites allowed to create budget allocation diagrams through the descriptive and comparative analysis of publicly available financial reports from different years. This made it possible to observe the largest share of the budget was distributed to *France Médias Monde* during François Hollande's presidential term (Figure 2).

The given study has its limitations related to the selected analytical methods, data accessibility and the scope of the research. As with most case- or process-focused studies, our findings are not intended to be generalized or applied to other countries in terms of the role of presidents in shaping cultural diplomacy mechanisms. Further research may reveal whether our theoretical model and the relationships identified between presidential roles and institutional transformations can be applied.

Nevertheless, the possibility of conducting comparative analyses with other countries would place the research in a wider global framework, demonstrating how cultural diplomacy alters within the context of a given state. Furthermore, the process-tracing typically allows detecting partial attribution of the influence, hence additional factors determining the institutional transformation of cultural diplomacy in France may be found out later on, in case of application of different research strategies, or based on additional data.

⁸ Cultural Diplomacy // Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères. December 2021. URL: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/cultural-diplomacy/> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

⁹ Ministère de la culture. URL: <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

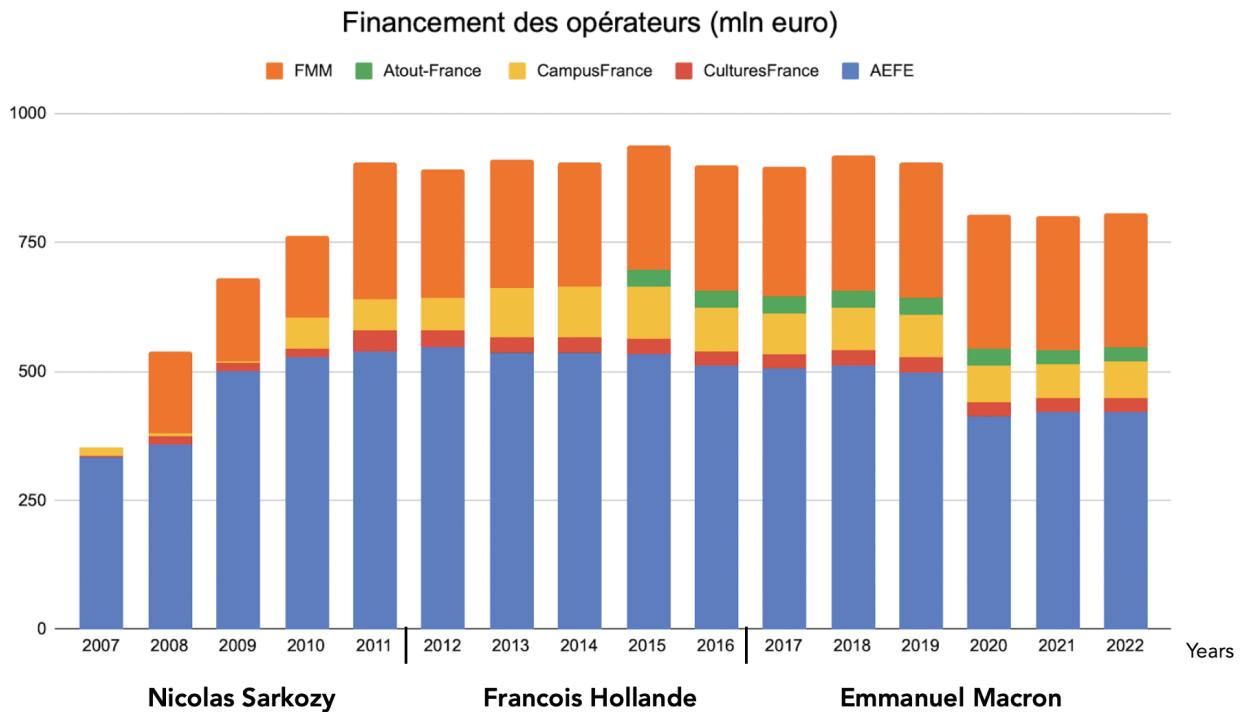


Figure 2. The Amount of Funding of Five State-Owned Organizations from the French State Budget, 2007–2022, constant prices in Euros: FMM stands for *France Médias Monde*, AEFE stands for Agency for French Education Abroad (*Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger*).

Source: composed by P.A. Voronova and E. Varpahovskis based on: Budget de l'État // Ministère de l'économie, des finances et de la souveraineté industrielle et numérique. 2007–2022. URL: <https://www.budget.gouv.fr/budget-etat> (accessed: 05.02.2024); Budget Allocated to France Médias Monde in France 2016–2024 // Statista. 2024. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240724195536/https://www.statista.com/statistics/1246880/france-medias-monde-annual-budget-france/> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

Furthermore, it should be taken into account that the research is based on online reports, which might be biased, being specific, the data may only represent an agenda favorable for the country's image, exclude controversial statements, focus on the interests of specific states and overemphasize the importance of certain events.

Results and Interpretations

Institutional Transformation of Cultural Diplomacy

To begin with, it is claimed that cultural diplomacy initially became popular in France in the 15th century, becoming much more common after the establishment of the Ancien Régime (Roche & Piniau, 1995). Though its mechanics have changed significantly and are

constantly being refined, the concept's meaning and fundamental ideas have remained mostly unchanged since that time.

Initially, cultural diplomacy played a relatively complementary role, ensuring that diplomatic missions allowed for the exchange of cultural assets as well as the establishment or maintenance of inter-kingdom contacts (Roche & Piniau, 1995). At first, the language occupied a legal position as the language of diplomacy and was regarded as the most significant cultural domain for the French government (Lane, 2013). The most popular instruments were cross-cultural scientific and artistic interactions. For example, the 18th century witnessed the establishment of the Galatasaray lyceum, where French professors taught the Turkish aristocracy (Roche & Piniau, 1995). Nowadays, the

French government supports the establishment of “*Institut Francais*” and “*Villas*,” which are known as institutions where people of different nationalities or French citizens can reside, study, and work if they have an interest in painting, writing music, sculpting, or conducting cultural research. Several “*Villas*” can be found throughout the world, including “*Villa Albertine*” in the United States, “*Villa Médicis*” in Italy, “*Villa Swagatam*” in India, “*Villa Kujoyama*” in Japan, and many more. This kind of international communication makes it possible to forge closer relationships with partner nations and to develop shared interests.

The aforementioned instances of scientific and cultural interchange demonstrate that, although the activities themselves take on a more contemporary bent, the overall orientation of cultural diplomacy remains unchanged. In addition, scholars assert that digitalization has an impact on cultural practices and modern diplomacy (Valenduc & Vendramin, 2017). The most obvious means of influencing other countries is through digital media, such as radio, TV and social media. The last two, which are portrayed by the media-focused organization *France Médias Monde*, have significant government funding (see Figure 2), indicating that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs views them as the primary objective for enhancing

France’s image abroad.¹⁰ Furthermore, *France Université Numérique* offers over 300 online courses at the that allow distant learning;¹¹ virtual art tours at the Louvre, the Pompidou Center, the Mont Saint-Michel and other historical places;¹² digital collaboration, for instance, between the French and African film industries for cultural exchange via online cinema¹³ and other activities, such as *Novembre Numérique*,¹⁴ which are increasingly taking place on the Internet. Each new technological advancement therefore inevitably leads to changes in the procedures of cultural diplomacy, ensuring that a greater number of people become aware of the government’s involvement in this area. Additionally, Figure 2 demonstrates that the year when François Hollande came to power, he transformed Nicolas Sárközy’s approach to state-agencies, increasing their financing and, consequently, the development.

Could a New President Precipitate an Institutional Transformation of Cultural Diplomacy?

The overview of the political profiles of Nicolas Sárközy, François Hollande and Emmanuel Macron from 2007 to 2022 demonstrated that the first two presidents were mostly focused on domestic affairs, while their international activity was targeted towards

¹⁰ Best of industries culturelles et créatives. Projets emblématiques de la mission prioritaire ICC (2020–2022) // Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères. Juillet 2023. URL: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/best-of-icc-09-10-23_cle05fb7a.pdf (accessed: 27.07.2024).

¹¹ Online or Distance Training // Campus France. URL: <https://www.campusfrance.org/en/online-correspondence-programmes> (accessed: 10.02.2025).

¹² Virtual Tours and French Museums: Get to Learn Online! // Institut Français. URL: <https://ife.ee/en/virtual-tours-and-french-museums-get-to-learn-online/> (accessed: 10.02.2025).

¹³ Festival de court métrage de Clermont-Ferrand: 10 films de catalogues IFCinéma mis à l’honneur // Institut Français. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20250210170714/https://www.institutfrancais.com/fr/magazine/portfolio/festival-du-court-metrage-de-clermont-ferrand-10-films-des-catalogues-ifcinema> (accessed: 10.02.2025).

¹⁴ Novembre Numérique // Institut Français. URL: <https://www.pro.institutfrancais.com/fr/offre/novembre-numerique> (accessed: 10.03.2025).

conflict resolution through hard power tools and economic aid. This may be explained by exogenous factors, such as the diminishing stability of geopolitical conditions, which were mostly undermined by the war in Iraq. Meanwhile, Emmanuel Macron emerged as a president who employed soft power instruments in interstate communication. Although cultural diplomacy has never formally been declared the only method of contemporary international affairs, Macron frequently uses it in his actions.

In particular, during his first presidential term (2017–2022), the Louvre Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and a branch of the Centre Pompidou in Shanghai — the West Bund Museum (*Centre Pompidou x West Bund Museum*) — were inaugurated. A global plan for the spread of the French language and multilingualism was proposed.¹⁵ In 2016, the annual “UK/France Spotlight on Culture” was launched, representing collaboration between the two countries,¹⁶ and other international events took place during his presidential term. These examples provide sufficient evidence to support de Corte’s assertion that cultural diplomacy of France received “a renewed

impetus” during the presidency of Emmanuel Macron (de Corte, 2019).

It is worth mentioning that, within the borders of the European Union, France was quite actively building ties with Italy and Germany. As a result, it signed a Quirinal Treaty with Italy, which supposes cooperation in areas such as economic development, national security, scientific achievements, educational and cultural exchange programs.¹⁷ Regarding cultural diplomacy, Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel decided to facilitate knowledge-sharing through academic exchanges at the *Institut Français* or the *Goethe Institut*.¹⁸

The French Republic has gained notoriety for creating unique projects that are unmatched anywhere else in the globe, which is rather intriguing. For example, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which was built on Saadiyat Island in the United Arab Emirates, opened its doors in 2017 with the backing of Emmanuel Macron, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, and Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and the Emir of Dubai.¹⁹ The main goal of this museum is to strengthen cooperation between France and the United Arab Emirates by uniting

¹⁵ Francophony and the French Language // Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères. URL: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/francophony-and-the-french-language/> (accessed: 10.02.2025).

¹⁶ UK/France Spotlight on Culture // The British Council*. URL: <https://www.britishcouncil.fr/en/programmes/uk-france-spotlight-2024> (accessed: 10.02.2025).

* *The British Council* is recognized as an undesirable organization in the territory of the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

¹⁷ The Quirinal Treaty: Joint Press Dossier of the Embassies of Italy in France, and France in Italy on 2023, the Year of Entry into Force // Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. November 23, 2023. URL: https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/retediplomatica/2023/11/il-trattato-del-quirinale-dossier-stampa-congiunto-delle-ambasciate-ditalia-in-francia-e-di-francia-in-italia-sul-2023-anno-dellentrata-in-vigore/ (accessed: 27.07.2024).

¹⁸ Tulun T.E. German-French Joint Cultural Institutes: Transformation of the “Civilizing” Mission of West European Colonialism // Avrasya İncelemeleri Merkezi. Analysis No. 2019/2. February 26, 2019. URL: <https://avim.org.tr/en/Analiz/GERMAN-FRENCH-JOINT-CULTURAL-INSTITUTES-TRANSFORMATION-OF-THE-CIVILIZING-MISSION-OF-WEST-EUROPEAN-COLONIALISM> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

¹⁹ See: Langton J. Emmanuel Macron and UAE Leaders Formally Open Louvre Abu Dhabi // The National News. November 8, 2017. URL: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/emmanuel-macron-and-uae-leaders-formally-open-louvre-abu-dhabi-1.674159> (accessed: 02.02.2025); Our Partners // Louvre Abu Dhabi. URL: <https://www.louvreabudhabi.ae/en/about-us/our-partners> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

projects.²⁰ As such, it serves as an important means of fostering international relations through cultural diplomacy.

However, it remains difficult to assess the extent to which the inauguration changed the general strategy for foreign policy, and cultural diplomacy in particular. Notably, Jacques Chirac first proposed the idea for the Louvre Abu Dhabi project in 2007.²¹ However, for a variety of reasons, it never came to fruition, the majority of which came from the Arab partners. This demonstrates that although Emmanuel Macron did not invent any of the currently-known cultural projects after 2017, he undoubtedly encouraged their success rather than putting an end to them.

In order to trace the changes that have happened to the administrative mechanisms of cultural diplomacy, it is important to look at the organization responsible for it — the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

One of the most noticeable changes was the renaming of the ministry, which occurred with each new president. For example, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs was part of Nicolas Sárközy's cabinet in 2007 (Cole, 2012). Under François Hollande, it was renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development in 2012.²² Furthermore, in 2017, Emmanuel Macron renamed it the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs.²³

Changes to the title of a ministry may not significantly impact its functioning. However, it is evident that the government's foreign policy was equally focused on Europe during Nicolas Sárközy's presidency, demonstrating France's indispensable role in the Union (Charillon & Wong, 2012). This "Europeanization" became less visible in 2012–2017, when Hollande proclaimed a focus on establishing international peace and supporting the developing countries, thereby diverting the state's focus away from Europe (Müller, 2013). Ultimately, it was "returned" at Emmanuel Macron's request, taking into account that France and the EU today function as a unified entity, giving the state more power — both soft and hard.²⁴ Clearly, the ministry's formal title aligns with the president's state objective. What validates our theory on the changes in France's institutional systems for cultural diplomacy brought about by the president's tenure. Our idea, however, does not specify the extent of the change. The present study illustrates that there has been a certain degree of gradualism and even a reincarnation of some ideas of cultural diplomacy transformations (e.g., Chirac and Macron). Hence, we cannot claim that the new president means complete institutional and administrative transformation of French cultural diplomacy.

²⁰ Our Story // Louvre Abu Dhabi. URL: <https://www.louvreabudhabi.ae/en/about-us/our-story> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

²¹ Message to the President of the United Arab Emirates during the Signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement Creating the Louvre Abu Dhabi Universal Museum // Présidence de la République. March 6, 2007. URL: http://www.jacqueschirac-asso.fr/archives-elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/anglais/speeches_and_documents/2007/fi001286.html (accessed: 10.02.2025).

²² Darnis J.-P. François Hollande's Presidency: A New Era in French Foreign Policy? IAI Working Papers. Instituto Affari Internazionali // HAL Open Science. 2012. URL: <https://hal.science/hal-03916317/document> (accessed: 02.02.2025).

²³ Kempin R. France's Foreign and Security Policy under President Macron // SWP Research Paper. 2021. No. 28. URL: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2021RP04/> (accessed: 02.02.2025).

²⁴ Ibid.

The main agencies that function as the branches of the Ministry with focus on culture include *Institut Français*, Agency for French Education Abroad, *Campus France*, and *France Médias Monde*.²⁵ Each of these agencies became an integral part of the Ministry in the process of the General Review of Public Policies (*Révision Générale des Politiques Publiques*) under the leadership of Nicolas Sárközy in 2008.²⁶ Therefore, although their leaders, internal structures, funding and other aspects may have changed, their organizational composition has remained similar since that year.

The primary responsibility of the *Institut Français* is to establish cultural networks, expand its global presence, and encourage cross-cultural interaction.²⁷ Despite its establishment in 1907, the organization received substantial government support and was designated as an official organization in 2010, when Nicolas Sárközy was the head of state and Michèle Alliot-Marie was the minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs.²⁸ Additionally, the Agency for French Education Abroad focuses on the international educational programs, and there have been over 560 schools since 1990.²⁹

Another education-focused organization is *Campus France*, which was established in 2010 by the initiative of the Ministry under the leadership of Bernard Kouchner.³⁰ Finally, the global media outlet *France Médias Monde* was founded in 2008 and quickly rose to prominence as a major mechanism of influence by disseminating the above mentioned concepts and vision through radio and television shows.³¹ Initially known as the “Society of exterior audiovisual of France,” it was strongly supported by Nicolas Sárközy, who claimed that it would be an efficient tool allowing for the overview of information and the spread of shared beliefs of the French government.³² *France Médias Monde* as it is known today emerged in 2013, unifying and structuring all broadcast channels while preserving the initial goals (Saragosse & Bonos, 2016).

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the establishment of state agencies in conjunction with the presidential administration marked the beginning of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs’ primary work in conjunction with state agencies, as evidenced by the election of Nicolas Sárközy and subsequent appointment of two ministers, Bernard Kouchner and Michèle Alliot-Marie. Organizations such

²⁵ Implementing Agencies of the Ministry // Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères. October 2022. URL: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/implementing-agencies-of-the-ministry/> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Institut Français. URL: <https://www.institutfrancais.com/fr> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

²⁸ Loi n° 2010–873 du 27 juillet 2010 relative à l’action extérieure de l’Etat (1) // Légifrance. 2010. URL: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000022521532> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

²⁹ See: Lycées français du monde. Rapport d’activité 2016/2017 // Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères. 2017. URL: <https://aefe.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/asset/file/rapport-activite-aefe-2016-2017.pdf> (accessed: 15.02.2025); Loi n° 90–588 du 6 Juillet 1990 Portant Création de l’Agence pour l’Enseignement Français à l’étranger (1) // Légifrance. 1990. URL: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000000350878> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

³⁰ Décret n° 2011–2048 du 30 décembre 2011 relatif à Campus France // Légifrance. 2011. URL: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000025059513> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

³¹ France Médias Monde (FMM) // République Français. URL: <https://annuaire-entreprises.data.gouv.fr/entreprise/france-medias-monde-fmm-501524029> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

³² Projet de Loi Relatif à la Communication audiovisuelle et au nouveau service public de la télévision // Senate. 6 janvier 2009. URL: <https://www.senat.fr/rap/l08-150/l08-15038.html> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

as *France Médias Monde*, *Campus France*, and *Institut Français* were founded during the period of Sárközy leadership. Additionally, Figure 3 demonstrates that the leaders do not always preserve and maintain organizations founded earlier, but also choose to renew them in accordance with their administrative approach. An example of this is the “Society of exterior audiovisual of France,” which was updated to *France Médias Monde* during the presidency of Francois Hollande. This change was not only marked by rebranding, but also by closer cooperation with the government.³³

Even though it is difficult to demonstrate how each president influenced the shift in diplomatic instruments, it is possible to do so by examining the work of the ministers.

For example, various alterations may have been observed in Laurent Fabius’s conduct throughout the tenure of Françoise Hollande. In addition, it appears that he was a major force behind the use of social media in 2015, which is one of the most crucial public diplomacy tools available today.³⁴ Furthermore, Laurent Fabius resorted to the use of conventional cultural diplomacy techniques like diplomatic missions, which were also supported by Jean-Yves Le Drian, a minister under Emmanuel Macron’s presidency. But Le Drian was primarily interested in the African continent, whilst Fabius

concentrated on the Asian one.³⁵ Additionally, it is apparent that the latter minister used diplomatic mechanisms, such as roundtables, sessions, summits, and other events more actively. These mechanisms presume the participation of various international actors and can be seen as a tool that enables the development of cooperation with a greater number of partners at the same time.³⁶ As a result, the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs has increasingly adopted widely available tools such as *Twitter* (now *X*),³⁷ *Facebook*³⁸ and other social media platforms, while also maintaining more traditional approaches such as UNESCO sessions, Francophonie summits, diplomatic trips aimed at preserving international ties and other significant events fostering cooperation.

Overall, it appears that over the years 2007 to 2022, there were not many notable changes to the way the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs operated. However, they were primarily focused on the political agenda, which was typically represented by the Ministry’s name, which focused on Europe, Asia, or Africa. While the changes coincided with the election of a new president, neither of them officially announced the revised objectives of cultural diplomacy. Therefore, while the correlation is clear, it cannot be said that they were the sole influence on the development of diplomatic mechanisms.

³³ Signature du premier contrat d’objectifs et de moyens entre l’État et France Médias Monde // Pouria Amirshahi. 9 avril 2014. URL: <https://www.pouriaamirshahi.fr/signature-du-premier-contrat-dobjectifs-et-de-moyens-entre-letat-et-france-medias-monde/> (accessed: 15.02.2025).

³⁴ “Ambassadors Week” — Launch of a Social Media Campaign (July 10, 2015) // Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20231205023032/https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/news/ambassadors-week/prior-editions/23nd-conference-of-ambassadors-24-28-august-2015/article/ambassadors-week-launch-of-a-social-media-campaign-10-07-15> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

³⁵ Search: Jean-Yves Le Drian // Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères. URL: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/spip.php?page=recherche&lang=en&tri=date_modif&id_rubrique=&recherche=Jean-Yves+Le+Drian&debut_articles=180&page_courante=6#pagination_articles (accessed: 27.07.2024).

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Access to *Twitter* is blocked in the Russian Federation (*Editor’s note*).

³⁸ Activities of *Facebook* social media, the *Meta Platforms Inc.* project, are prohibited in Russia (*Editor’s note*).

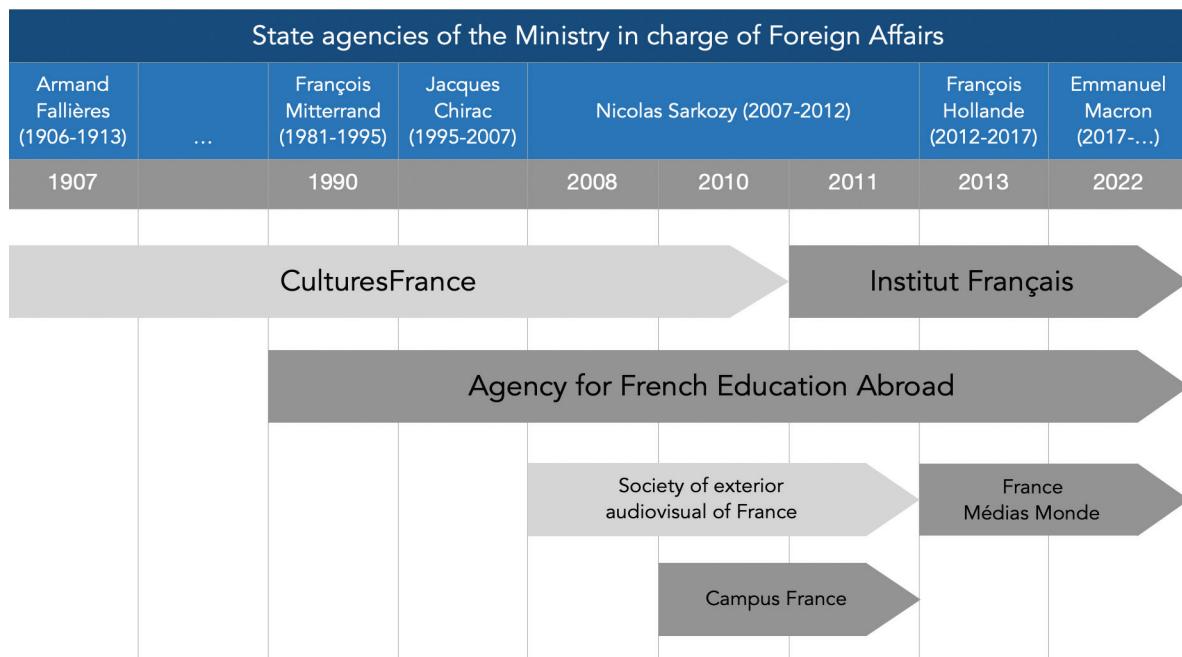


Figure 3. Foundation and Functioning of French State Agencies under the Supervision of the Ministry in Charge of Foreign Affairs, 1907–2022

Sources: compiled by P.A. Voronova and E. Varpahovskis, based on: Loi n° 90-588 du 6 Juillet 1990 Portant Création de l'Agence pour l'Enseignement Français à l'étranger (1) // Légifrance. 1990. URL: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT00000350878> (accessed: 05.02.2024); Loi n° 2010-873 du 27 juillet 2010 relative à l'action extérieure de l'Etat (1) // Légifrance. 2010. URL: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000022521532> (accessed: 05.02.2024); Décret n° 2011-2048 du 30 décembre 2011 relatif à Campus France // Légifrance. 2011. URL: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000025059513> (accessed: 05.02.2024); France Médias Monde (FMM) // République Français. URL: <https://annuaire-entreprises.data.gouv.fr/entreprise/france-medias-monde-fmm-501524029> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

Do Imperfections in the System Determine the Need for Innovation?

Changes to cultural diplomacy mechanisms are likely to have occurred as a result of systemic flaws, as well as the leader's distinct ideas and perspectives on how to handle foreign relations through soft power tools. Consequently, each change in leadership has led to modifications in administrative processes, the adoption of new instruments, the launch of new projects, and the establishment of new agencies to address the shortcomings of previous ones.

For instance, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs has always supervised state agencies. These agencies have also been subject

to reforms. In 2011, *Institut Français* replaced *CulturesFrance*, which had few resources and could not meet the requirements of modern society.³⁹ Thus, with the first *Institut Français* director, Xavier Darcos, the organization became the one that would represent French identity all over the world, currently accounting to 98 institutes and 128 branches abroad.⁴⁰ It can be concluded that the agency was founded because *Institut Français* allowed to promote more fully French language and culture, rather than because Nicolas Sárközy wanted to create another organization during his presidency. For instance, compared to *CulturesFrance*, it now handles twice as many issues, particularly when

³⁹ The Digital Transformation of International Cultural and Linguistic Action // Institut Français. 2022. URL: <https://www.institutfrancais.com/en/programmes-and-projects/the-digital-transformation-of-international-cultural-and-linguistic-action> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

⁴⁰ Liste des Instituts français et de leurs antennes // Data.gouv. 2019. URL: <https://www.data.gouv.fr/datasets/liste-des-instituts-francais-et-de-leurs-antennes/> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

it comes to the regions it serves, which currently encompass Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. This was previously impossible due to the county-focused model.⁴¹

In addition, the instruments required updating. The Internet was already a well-known tool of influence by the time Emmanuel Macron came into office. However, he was the one who was able to effectively incorporate more digital instruments into cultural diplomacy. This can be seen clearly on the website of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs,⁴² which recognized the need to digitize cultural diplomacy, especially after massive lock-downs imposed in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In collaboration with the *Institut Français*, a plan was created to ensure a smooth transition to the supposedly new digital world. The organization produced publications on digital material, its tools, and implementation; it also funded specialized training on the use of technology breakthroughs. It also developed online courses to ensure distant learning in order to expand the audience and cover more geographical reach.⁴³ Overall, this has enabled France to share its national interests, culture, and language with a larger audience around the world, thereby contributing to the greater efficiency of cultural diplomacy.

Furthermore, Laurent Fabius, the Minister for Foreign Affairs under Macron's leadership, significantly boosted public interest in French

diplomacy and state foreign policy by organizing "Ambassadors Week."⁴⁴ For example, he initiated a social media campaign through which people worldwide could learn about the work of French diplomats via official *Facebook* and *Twitter* posts, along with the open event called "I am meeting an ambassador" and the hashtag *#SemaineAmbass*.⁴⁵

The president's interest in information technology could explain the use of digital tools. Nonetheless, it could also be explained by the outdated nature of the cultural diplomacy instruments that were once in use, such as live cultural events, traditional museum exhibitions, and offline language instruction. Before innovations entered the field, these and many more processes were sufficient in terms of efficiency, but someone had to insist on an upgrade. Consequently, modifications were required to enhance the previous system, which exhibited certain deficiencies.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study, which employed process-tracing analysis to examine the impact of the new president's inauguration on the institutional transformation of France's cultural diplomacy, permitted to test two hypotheses. As indicated by the summary Table, both of the tested hypotheses were proven through smoking gun tests.

⁴¹ Knudsen, E., Markovic, D. France. Country Report. Stuttgart : Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, 2022. URL: https://opus.bsz-bw.de/ifa/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/68/file/ECP_Monitor_France_Country_Report.pdf (accessed: 27.07.2024).

⁴² Ministry Digital Transformation Plan // Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères. June 29, 2021. URL: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/ministry-digital-transformation-plan/> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

⁴³ La transformation numérique de l'action culturelle et linguistique internationale // Institut Français. 2022. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20241214125643/https://www.institutfrancais.com/en/programmes-and-projects/the-digital-transformation-of-international-cultural-and-linguistic-action> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

⁴⁴ "Ambassadors Week" — Launch of a Social Media Campaign (July 10, 2015) // Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20231205023032/https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/the-ministry-and-its-network/news/ambassadors-week/prior-editions/23nd-conference-of-ambassadors-24-28-august-2015/article/ambassadors-week-launch-of-a-social-media-campaign-10-07-15> (accessed: 27.07.2024).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Firstly, within the context of the 21st century, it was found that the new president influences the existing institutional mechanisms of France's cultural diplomacy. Such transformations may affect the nomenclature of the responsible bodies, their structural configuration, budgeting and the political scope of their activities.

Secondly, these transformations were observed to occur as a result of discrepancies between the primarily existing structure of France's cultural diplomacy and the

requirements of the country's new foreign policy objectives, as well as the vision of the incumbent president, or members of his team. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the commencement of a presidential term is often accompanied by innovation, although not necessarily an overhaul of the existing structure. In some cases, there may be evidence of a legacy of the previous administration's vision on the role and format of French cultural diplomacy, which is maintained by the following leader.

Summary Table for Hypotheses 1 and 2 Testing

Presidential transition / Hypotheses	Chirac — Sárközy transition	Sárközy — Hollande transition	Hollande — Macron transition	Supported / Not supported
H1. Coming to power of the new president leads to transformations in the institutional mechanisms of France's cultural diplomacy	Renamed from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs: focus on Europe, France's indispensable role in the Union and collaboration with state-agencies, including those responsible for cultural diplomacy	Renamed from the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development: shift from Europe to international peace and support for developing countries	Renamed from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development to the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs: France and the EU as a unified entity (e.g., cooperation with Italy and Germany (the Quirinal Treaty))	Supported
	Establishment of <i>Institut Français</i> , <i>Campus France</i> , and Society of exterior audiovisual of France (SAEF)	Increased financing of and further development of state-agencies	Maintenance of state-agencies and their funding at the same level as during Hollande's term	
H2. Imperfections of the previously introduced innovations in France's cultural diplomacy's institutional mechanisms lead to transformations in France's cultural diplomacy's institutional mechanisms	Establishment of "Society of exterior audiovisual of France" in 2008: unification of French foreign broadcasting channels and approach to it as a soft power tool	SAEF updated to <i>France Médias Monde</i> in 2013: rebranding and closer cooperation with the government	—	Supported
	—	More regular use of social media (<i>Twitter</i> , <i>Facebook</i> , and other SM platforms) in comparison with Sárközy, but still adherence to more conventional tools (UNESCO sessions, the Francophone summit, diplomatic trips)	Effective incorporation of most digital instruments into cultural diplomacy; "Ambassadors Week" boosted public interest in the activities of French diplomats	

Note. The process tracing's smoking gun hypothesis tests applied. Smoking gun test does not exclude probability of other factors causal influence (Collier, 2011).

Source: compiled by P.A. Voronova and E. Varpahovskis.

The present paper demonstrates that the digital transformation has led to changes in France's cultural diplomacy. The argument put forward by Bjola and Manor (Bjola & Manor, 2025) posits that Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) could influence the digitalization of diplomacy. Following this idea, it is reasonable to assume that the

introduction of Generative AI tools could lead to institutional changes in France's cultural diplomacy, irrespective of whether this occurs under Macron's present presidency or a subsequent administration in 2027. The necessity for further research into institutional transformation of France's cultural diplomacy is hereby suggested.

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About the authors:

Voronova Polina Aleksandrovna — Digital PR Manager At Yango; Postgraduate Student, Faculty Of Creative Industries, National Research University — Higher School of Economics (HSE University); 20 Myasnitskaya St, Moscow, 101000, Russian Federation. ORCID: 0009-0009-0454-3786; e-mail: pavoronova_2@edu.hse.ru

Varpahovskis Eriks — PhD (Political Science), Associate Professor, Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs, National Research University — Higher School of Economics (HSE University); 20 Myasnitskaya St, Moscow, 101000, Russian Federation; eLibrary SPIN-code: 7950-2324. ORCID: 0000-0002-6740-6377; e-mail: evarpahovskis@hse.ru; evarpahovskis@gmail.com