



Francophilia: Case of Armenia

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FRANCOPHILIA: CASE OF ARMENIA

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*There are already a lot of papers about Francophil-
ia. Nevertheless, most of them involve African countries
or French speaking countries. Studying Francophilia in
Armenia brings a new angle to the movement since it is
an underlying and entrenched concept in the countries
that do not speak French. So, we decided to study the
weight of the French language in Armenia. The goal
was to find explanations of this Francophile movement
by understanding its roots, actors and dynamics. It is
through readings and interviews that we collected our
information to write this paper. The main and most ob-
vious reason why French is so popular is partly due to
the French policies and soft power throughout the world
and as such also in Armenia. We acknowledge that we
miss diverse sources to make this paper more relevant.
What would be important to understand after this is
how the vision of Francophilia is biased and only based
on France whereas it covers numerous and diverse pop-
ulations.*

Introduction

The distance between France and Armenia is 3497 kilometers. No more than a person out of ten has notions of French in Armenia, and according to a study from the International Organization for Francophonie, there are 0,3% francophones out of 2,9 million Armenians¹. Then, how can we explain the Francophile movement? We decid-

¹ From the report of the Linguistic Observatory of the French Language, page 96. https://www.francophonie.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Edition%202019%20La%20langue%20francaise%20dans%20le%20monde_VF%202020%20.pdf

ed to work on Francophilia and how it is a French soft power tool and to precisely study this in Armenia. In Armenia, French is not an official language and as the figures show it is not a predominant language either. Nevertheless, ties between the two countries are really deep and mostly unknown that is why we considered it interesting. Thus, through this paper, we hope we can shed light not only on their relations but also on the Armenian Francophile movement by focusing on the Armenian interest in the French language.

Francophilia concerns foreigners and their interests for the French nation, its culture and values. With not confusing with Francophonie, which is the quality of speaking French, it also includes all the people, institutions and governments that use French on a daily basis, either as an administrative language, teaching one or a chosen one. The word was invented by Onésime Reclus, a French geographer at the end of the XIX century. This represents France, Belgium, Switzerland but also twenty-six countries in Africa such as Congo, Madagascar and Rwanda. Francophonie is for France a diplomatic tool part of its soft power. Soft Power 30 is defining it as the “use of positive attraction and persuasion to achieve foreign policy objectives”. Soft Power 30 is a ranking made every year by the strategic firm Portland and the university of South Carolina; they ranked France first in 2017² and 2019³.

The love for French in Armenia is a fact. However, the challenge here is to find reasons for this movement which is at first not expected. Indeed, as we mentioned, the two countries are far from each other and their relations are not obvious. Through this research we found explanations to it, either historical, political or economic. We decided to list and detail them to explain, as much as we can, the Armenian Francophile move-

ment. First of all, this essay will focus on historic and deep ties of Armenia and France. These ties are political, cultural and economic and are such for centuries. Then, we will examine the Armenian diaspora in France which helps keeping relationships between the two nations. Another explanation for this interest in the French language is the French soft power; indeed, France has an important cultural diplomacy around the world, including Armenia. Finally, we will mention the Armenian membership of the International Organization for Francophonie and how this fact contributes to the enhancement of the Armenian Francophilia.

As far as the method used is concerned, I first tried to read as much as possible about what Francophonie and Francophilia meant, indeed the goal was to grasp the key concepts. There are a lot of research papers, books and reviews about Francophonie, its objectives, what it represents for France. For instance, Philippe Lane⁴ wrote about the French presence across the world explaining its roots, goals, the policies put in place. Most of the time, these papers illustrate their statements with African French speaking countries. Indeed, Africa is the continent with the most French speaking people. Also, this region is a priority for Francophonie. The following step was to link it with Armenia. For doing that, I looked for papers and books about the history, about the diaspora and about the relations between France and Armenia. Finding data about this was more challenging, indeed, there are not many papers about the specific relationship between France and Armenia. Nevertheless, I read many papers about the Armenian diaspora in France and the history of Armenia. Concerning cultural diplomacy, most papers speak about the African countries and rarely mention Armenia. Most of the papers I read were in French since it was about France, but

² See Overall Ranking 2017 https://softpower30.com/?country_years=2017

³ See Overall Ranking 2019 https://softpower30.com/?country_years=2019

⁴ Lane, Philippe. ‘Présence Française Dans Le Monde - L’action Culturelle et Scientifique de La France’. ResearchGate, May 2016, 131.

I also read in English. For this research, I also tried to reach professors, organizations related to Francophonie that are in Armenia and abroad. Unfortunately, most of them did not answer. I tried to diversify the point of views and the sources of information in order to be more relevant. Therefore, this paper is mainly based on theoretical resources found on different research platforms.

Deep and historic ties

These deep and ancient ties can find an explanation in religion. Indeed, crusades were a series of religious wars supported by the Latin Church, the crusaders wanted to spread Christianity, by force, in order to recover the Holy Land from the Islamic rule. Since Armenia is the first country to ever adopt Christianity as a state religion, they represented an important ally for the crusaders in the Eastern Mediterranean region.

Thus, one of the first contacts between France and Armenia dates back to the crusades, at the time Armenia was the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia (XII-XIX century). The Frankish lords got married with the Armenian princesses creating a French-Armenian royal line, the last king of it was Leon V. This royal line lasted for three centuries, meaning as much time to create and establish an important Francophilia sometimes with a Francophonie, which, depending on the social classes, lasted. For example, the king Leon II started a francization of the royal court and of the State, breaking thus with the Armenian tradition. He implemented the Frankish feudal system in the kingdom and a central and powerful royal power which corresponded to the French system.

Francophilia can also be explained by an important cultural and historical characteristic of the Armenian people: the “resistance”. Armenians are often described as resistant and conservative people. Indeed, they protected their language, their culture and traditions throughout the centuries despite the fact that they were scattered all over the world. Francophilia could have been included in what Armenians resisted for. First of all, three centu-

ries of cohabitation leaves marks, Armenians would talk about it for generations creating a positive image of France in the Armenian imaginary. Something we need to understand is how France and the French language are still so appreciated when we know how important the Armenian language is for its speakers. Indeed, Armenian is one of the rare languages directly descending from Indo-European and is still alive more than two thousand years after. For linguists, it is a genuine treasury. As explained, the Armenian language is part of what we called the Armenian resistance.

Coming back to history, most of the high dignitaries of the Ottoman Empire were francophones and they lived in a French way. They succeeded in keeping their Armenian identity and living a French life. Thus, through all the XIX century, thanks to these lords and their patronage, French works were translated, especially Victor Hugo's works. With the French Revolution of 1789, the republican ideas convinced the minority of the Ottoman Empire and more specifically the Armenian community. The fact that the Armenians took the French republican ideas does not look like a coincidence, it can be interpreted as an evidence of the Armenian-French old implicit relationships. The Armenian revolutionary movement was well implemented in the Eastern Anatolia, Cilicia and Constantinople. They created their own political parties: Armenakan in 1885, Hentchack in 1887 and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) in 1890. During World War I, the French Orient Legion, founded in 1916, was mainly composed of the Armenians that decided to enroll themselves in the army to fight for France. Moreover, most French Armenians supported the fight against the Axis by going to the Front or enrolling themselves into the Resistance, the most famous of them being Missak Manouchian, who received a Resistance medal.

Archag Tchobanian is an Armenian that exiled himself in France in 1895. He is the founder of the armenophile movement in France and he convinced many French politicians such as Georges Clémenceau, Jean

Jaurès. Moreover, he also created a pro-Armenian committee and a few years after in 1900 an armenophile newspaper, Pro-Arménia. Before moving to France, he had been translating French poets and participating in the spreading of French ideas among the Armenian community. Due to his efforts, France discovered the cultural and artistic dimension of Armenians but also how the Enlightenment thinking was developed among Armenians. Tchobanian works can be considered as the contact point, an achieved symbol, which for eight centuries linked peoples of Armenia and France.

These historic relations have consequences on political and diplomatic relations nowadays. Thus, the diplomatic relations between Armenia and France were established in 1992. Indeed, in 1984, Mitterrand, the French president at the time, was one of the first head of state to publicly recognize the Armenian genocide of 1915. Then, in 2001, the French Parliament voted a law recognizing the genocide. However, they still have not managed to make the negation of it punishable. Throughout years, the Armenian and French High Representatives met multiple times, Robert Kocharyan visited France in 2003, Chirac went to Armenia in 2006 and it was the first time that a French president visited Armenia. As far as economic ties are concerned, France mainly imports agricultural goods and there are big French companies established in Armenia such as Pernod Ricard or Veolia. For the centenary of the Armenian Genocide in 2015, François Hollande was present, confirming his own engagement but also the French one at the presidential level in the last ten years.

The Armenian diaspora in France

There are around 8 to 10 million Armenians around the world and 3 million of them live in Armenia, according to estimates of 2020. There is no precise calculation possible, but it is estimated that in 2011 there are around 600,000 Armenians in France and among them 400,000, were born in France.

According to the INSEE⁵, in 2008, 15000 persons in metropolitan France were born in Armenia. The diaspora is concentrated in Marseille, Lyon, Valence, Paris and its suburbs. Thus, the French Armenian diaspora is the biggest in Western Europe and the third one in the world, after Russia and the United States.

The aim of the Armenian Diaspora Survey (ADS), conducted by the Armenian Institute of London, is to inform the public, scholars and policymakers about the reality of the Armenian diaspora in the XXI century. They did a study case about the Armenian diaspora in Marseille, a city on the Mediterranean Sea in France.

The first Armenian family to settle in Marseille was the d'Armény, back in 1612. The patriarch of the family, Antoine d'Armény, was close to Louis Fréjus, a major merchant in the city at the time. Thus, the Armenian neighborhood in Marseille was established in the XVII century. Indeed, an Armenian chapel from this century has been found as well as repositories belonging to merchants. There were a lot of Armenian merchants in Marseille from the Ottoman Empire, willing to establish their business in the city. Their presence led Colbert, one of the ministers of Louis XIV, to create Marseille's free port of Armenians. Because of their number, a street was even renamed Rue⁶ Armeny. At the end of the XVII century, it is said that there were about 400 Armenians in Marseille. A 2nd flow of Armenian migration from the Ottoman Empire occurred after the massacre of 1894-96 and after the Armenian Genocide in 1915. The newcomers were helped by those who settled down during the previous centuries. Thus, the Armenian National Union was created in 1923, aiming to help the Armenian refugees of the Camp Oddo⁷. The next year, they formed a scouting union, *Homenetmen*. At the beginning of the the 20th century the Armenian diaspora also established itself in terms of politics. Namely, the three major

⁵ National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies. It is the national bureau of statistics in France.

⁶ Street, in English.

⁷ Camp for Armenian survivors of the genocide located near Marseille.

Armenian political parties - Ramgavar⁸, Hunchakian⁹ and Dashnaktsutyun¹⁰ started operating in Marseille.

There are 900,000 inhabitants in Marseille. Almost one in ten people is Armenian, indeed the Armenian population would be about 80,000. Nowadays, a number of organizations continue to keep the community alive, such as a football club or Hamaskaïne Cultural Association.

The Armenian Genocide is one of the defining elements of the diaspora and its migrations. It marked a change of scale, after the genocide we can talk about a great diaspora. After the Armenian Genocide and the 1922 massacres, many Armenians from Anatolia and Cilicia left for France where there was already an established diaspora. Most Armenians were killed by the Turks in 1915 in Western Armenia. The survivors were forced to settle down in Syria through the Der Zor desert. Thousands of people were killed or died on their way. Only a few Armenians remained in Cilicia until 1922. Nevertheless, Armenians from the Ottoman Empire represented the majority of the diaspora. After the genocide, they are first considered as stateless and eventually as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

After the signing of the Lausanne treaty (July 24th, 1923), 2000 new Armenians arrived in France within a few weeks. Never did so many Armenians arrive in such a short period of time.

A lot of them also would leave for the Soviet Republic of Armenia, after the Second World War, between 1945 and 1948, answering the call of the Armenian communists. While leaving, they would bring with them all their Francophonie and Francophilia back to Armenia. Between 5000 and 7000 Armenians left France, the country where they were living for 20 years. However, returning to Motherland did not really meet their expectations, indeed

it was the beginning of a new Stalinian repression. When it was possible, many of them would leave back to France.

The French cultural diplomacy

Cultural and scientific diplomacy is really trendy since the 2008 election of Barack Obama. Following his first decisions, the debate around soft power arose again. Cultural diplomacy is a contemporary evolution of diplomacy, while being a part of foreign affairs. This is a policy that aims at exporting values of a national culture and to interact with other cultures. This is part of soft power, a notion developed by Joseph Nye at the end of the 20th century in his book *Bound to Lead*. It is an international relations concept explaining how a country can achieve its ends by using its power of attraction.

"Proof of power lies not in resources but in the ability to change the behavior of state." Nye, Joseph S. "Soft Power". *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153–71.

For Joseph Nye, it is more than just a political influence. He defined three ways of action: the agenda setting, the first tools of a country (its values, culture, etc.) and its diplomatic and public policies. In opposition to hard power, soft power needs civil society to exist. Nothing can be done without it and nothing against it. Since France has always given a great importance to its language, its culture, we can say it is a country of soft power. Cultural diplomacy is generally separated from public diplomacy. Thus, cultural diplomacy requires the involvement of the private sector as a partner to produce and provide the products, services and expertise for international outreach. In practice, it means that a typical state's cultural diplomacy may involve a host of collaborators, from organizations to individuals. Among the purposes of cultural diplomacy the will to establish a dialogue and building trust with other nations, seeking cultural and political recognition, improving the image and reputation

⁸ Also known as Armenian Democratic Liberal Party, it is a political party operating within the diaspora that was established in Constantinople in 1921 as the reunion of three previous parties.

⁹ Also known as the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party, it is the oldest continuously operating Armenian political party and was founded in 1887, in Geneva.

¹⁰ Also known as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, it has been founded in 1890 in Tbilisi, Georgia.

francophone movement. To keep a movement alive, there is a need of actors currently advocating it.

Therefore, history and the memorial heritage of a nation are not the only reason we can talk about a Francophile movement in Armenia. It is essential to mention the diaspora. There are more Armenians outside of Armenia than within the borders. The diaspora plays a key role in keeping an interest in France in particular because the country hosts one of the prominent Armenian diasporas in the world. The Genocide of 1915 shaped the diaspora and France was one of the countries where the Armenians massively fled to at that time. It signifies the fact that France had a special place in the collective imaginary. Many also returned to Armenia after World War II to eventually leave again for France. These movements of population are the source of the spread of values and in our case, of the French ones.

What was relevant to understand is how the French cultural diplomacy might have an influence in Armenia. Since the French cultural diplomacy is non-political, it is easier to be spread and to affect a greater number of countries. Thus, in Armenia, French is among the most spoken languages. Indeed, they work on attaching more importance to learning French. This shows the interest of Armenia in the French language at a state level. However, the best sign of their interest is the membership to the OIF. And it goes both ways, Armenia wants to play a part in the organization, and OIF trusts Armenia since they will host a Ministerial Conference and a Summit in three years. It can be interpreted as a sign of a successful French soft power. The OIF does not only promote the French language but also peace and democracy. Therefore, Armenia, by joining the OIF, does not only join this organization for supporting the French language but also for cherishing the values, which France

and other francophone countries stand for as a sign of Francophilia.

Through this research, we tried to shed light on many dynamisms happening in Armenia. The purpose was to understand Francophilia in Armenia and we tried to provide partial answers to this broad question. Moreover, we tried by analyzing the key concepts to make this question more approachable. To be self-critical, it should be mentioned that we have missed diverse points of views concerning this issue, which might pose more questions and riddles. Nevertheless, we did our best to reveal and identify some key points related to the research topic.

Thus, our question was to understand the Armenian Francophile movement and, more precisely, the interest in the French language. The Francophile movement finds its origins in history and that was built throughout this history. However, as it has been mentioned above, there is a need of actors to keep the movement alive. We can mention the diaspora which is a key actor by its number but also by its movements of population. Of course, the Armenian government and the directions it has been taking over the past decades are crucial. The analysis has shown that Armenia attaches much importance to OIF membership and respects the engagements it represents. Finally, the last actor we consider important is France and its cultural policies. Indeed, it is through them that the country makes the others attracted to its values and its language. It creates a positive image of France making people interested to know more about the dreamy idea they have.

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Ժուլի ՕԴՈՆ

*Լիոնի քաղաքական հետազոտությունների ինստիտուտի
(Sciences Po Lyon, France) ուսանող,
ՀՊՏՀ «Ամբերդ» հետազոտական կենտրոնի փորձնակ (պրակտիկանտ)*

ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆ ԵՎ ԱՇԽԱՐՀ

ՖՐԱՆԿՈՖԻԼԻԱ. ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ «ՔԵՅՍԸ»

Ակադեմիական գրականությունը հարուստ է ֆրանկոֆիլիային նվիրված բազմաթիվ աշխատություններով: Այնուամենայնիվ, դրանց մեծամասնությունը կապված է աֆրիկյան կամ ֆրանսախոս երկրների հետ: Հայաստանում ֆրանկոֆիլիայի հետազոտումն ինչ-որ առումով նոր հայացք է տվյալ հարցին և ընդգծում է այն փաստը, որ վերջինս արմատավորվել է նաև ոչ ֆրանսախոս երկրներում: Այս հոդվածում հեղինակը փորձել է բացահայտել Հայաստանում ֆրանկոֆիլիայի երևույթը, դրա առաջացման արմատները, նախադրյալները, դերակատարներին և ձևավորման շարժընթացը: Ուսումնասիրելով թեմային նվիրված հրապարակումներ, ինչպես նաև կիրառելով հարցազրույցների մեթոդը՝ նա հանգել է այն եզրակացության, որ ֆրանսերենն ամբողջ աշխարհում, այդ թվում՝ Հայաստանում հանրաճանաչ է՝ հիմնականում շնորհիվ Ֆրանսիայի վարած քաղաքականության և փափուկ ուժի: Միաժամանակ, հեղինակը խոստովանել է, որ այս հարցի հետագա և առավել խոր վերլուծության համար կարևորվում են այլ աղբյուրների ուսումնասիրությունն ու դրանց կիրառումը:

Հիմնաբառեր. *ֆրանկոֆիլիա, սփյուռք, փափուկ ուժ, լեզու, Ֆրանկոֆոնիայի միջազգային կազմակերպություն*

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АРМЕНИЯ И МИР

ФРАНКОФИЛИЯ: КЕЙС АРМЕНИИ

В научной литературе можно встретить множество исследований о франкофилии. Тем не менее, большинство из них связаны с африканскими или франкоязычными странами. Изучение франкофилии в Армении - это в некоторой степени новый взгляд на данный вопрос, подчеркивающий тот факт, что франкофилия также укоренилась в странах, которые не говорят на французском. В рамках данного исследования мы попытались раскрыть феномен, корни, предпосылки, основных действующих лиц и динамику формирования франкофильства в Армении. В процессе исследования были изучены публикации по этой теме, был также использован метод интервью. Главный и наиболее очевидный вывод нашего исследования заключается в том, что во всем мире, в том числе и в Армении, французский язык популярен отчасти благодаря политике и мягкой силе Франции. Надо также признать, что для дальнейшего и более глубокого анализа вопроса необходимо будет изучить и использовать другие источники.

Ключевые слова: *франкофилия, диаспора, мягкая сила, язык, Международная Организация Франкофонии*