
Politicon

**Applying Cultural Diplomacy
To Overcome Political Distress:
The Case Of Azerbaijani French Relations**

Federica Buono

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is to illustrate which line of communication is adopted by Azerbaijan in its relations with the French Republic. The focus is on how culture can, in some cases, be a tool for softening some sharp aspects of the Azerbaijani-French dialogue. In pursuing this goal, there is an attempt to understand how and when the Franco- Azerbaijani relations have been articulated historically and what it is instead set on today. In the view of these considerations the paper presents a tripartite structure and it follows a deductive logic approach, meaning that from a general conceptual description of what public diplomacy is, the attention gradually shifts on a specific case study, which is the one of Azerbaijan in its relations with France from a cultural point of view.

The first chapter is of the theoretical nature, and it explains the concept of public diplomacy, its definition, how it differs from the traditional one and its connections to cultural diplomacy. It presents the state of the art related to this general topic, meaning what the scientific literature has been writing and collecting so far in relation with public diplomacy, trying however to subsequently highlight the most salient and useful features for the preparation of this paper.

The second chapter illustrates how the France-Azerbaijan connection originated after the latter's declaration of independence. It thus covers, the first steps of their diplomatic collaborations with reference also to the first point of contact between the two countries, dating back to 1919.

Finally, the third part examines how Azerbaijan implements the cultural actions towards the French Republic, which initiatives are being pursued in this field and the response of the latter.

The idea behind this paper is that cultural diplomacy contributes to the branding of a country, and by promoting its national interests, is capable of filling certain gaps or weaknesses of the country. In its cultural relations with France, Azerbaijan is a great example related to this concept. Culturally, the country has much to offer, having historically been a meeting point of numerous peoples and ethnicities. Taking advantage of this element to position itself under international attention, Azerbaijan promotes itself as a country that strives for the *rapprochement of peoples on the basis of universal, spiritual*

*values and mutual understanding.*¹

Therefore, the promotion of national cultural heritage in the world through cultural exchanges, exhibitions, and displays could be an effective way to entertain diplomatic relations with a country considered daunting from the point of view of the political dialogue.

¹ AIDA, Azerbaijan Development International Agency, *Azerbaijan's cultural diplomacy: at the service of national interests*, at: https://aida.mfa.gov.az/en/articles_centenary/279/

CHAPTER I

WHAT PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IS AND ITS APPLICATION TO CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

It is tempting to see public diplomacy as old wine in new bottles. Official communication aimed at foreign publics is after all no new phenomenon in international relations. Image cultivation, propaganda, and activities that we would now label as public diplomacy are nearly as old as diplomacy itself.¹

Jan Melissen

1.1 Difference between traditional and public diplomacy

The first step to comprehend public diplomacy is to briefly illustrate the concept of diplomacy itself. Diplomacy is understood as *the mechanisms short of war deployed by an international actor to manage the international environment.*² Sun Tzu, Chinese general and military philosopher, likens diplomacy to the ability to avoid coming to armed conflict, *the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.*³ The British political scientist and historian Martin Wight defines diplomacy as *the guiding institution of international relations.*⁴

When it comes to traditional diplomacy, it is considered as an art capable of mediating between entities organized in states that are foreign to each other and that interact in a specific system of reference, basically an international actor's attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with another international actor.⁵

In practice, it is the special ability to conduct negotiations between two or more parties in

¹ Jan M., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, New York, p. 3

² Nicholas J. C., *Public Diplomacy: Lesson from the past*, Figueroa Press, 2009, Los Angeles, p.12

³ Sun T., *On The Art of War*, Allandale Online Publishing, 2000. Leicester, p. 8

⁴ Geoff B., Maurice Keens-Soper and T. G. Otte, *Diplomatic Theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger*, Palgrave, 2001, p.2

⁵ Nicholas J. C., *Work Quoted*, pp. 12-13

sensitive way, and is the basis for the maintenance of peace, economic, social, and cultural relations. Generally, with this term refers to the set of all those official channels of communication that are used by the members of a state system, or by the network of embassies and consulates that represent their country abroad.⁶ Indeed, in the field of international relations, the most brilliant action can be turned into a failure if it is executed clumsily and tactlessly.⁷ In this framework, over the years, all those people who act in a *diplomatic way* could be categorized as *shrewd, full of tact and finesse* individuals.⁸ In history, the first diplomats were royal court representatives, especially family members, therefore during the Middle Age, diplomacy was usually identified with the upper class and not everyone had the same chance to hold this office. Consequently, diplomacy was not developed among states, but rather states.⁹

Things started to change around the mid-17th century when in 1648 the Westphalian Treaty was signed. This document marked a net boundary in the history of International Relations because it conferred a new order and organization to the world which started to be characterized by sovereign state entities.¹⁰ From this moment on, diplomacy and international law have been considered as key institutions of the international society. With the Westphalian era, states should no longer invade and destroy other countries, but

⁶ Geoff B., Maurice Keens-Soper and T. G. Otte, *Work Quoted*, p.1

⁷ George K., *On Diplomacy as a Profession*, in *Foreign Service Journal*, (2014) [1961], p.47
<http://www.afsa.org/sites/default/files/julyAugust2015fsj.pdf>

⁸ Definition in, Treccani Dictionary online, at:
<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/diplomatico/#:~:text=Chi%20appartiene%20alla%20carriera%20diplomatica,dicendo%20le%20cose%20a%20met%20C3%A0.>

⁹ *Ibidem*

¹⁰ The Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years' War and included a series of treaties that were signed in the cities of Osnabruck and Munster in 1648. These ended the wars of religion in Europe, establishing religious tolerance within and between states, in fact, before that period they conceived foreign policies and politics in general as a battle between good and evil depending on the religion with which the state was aligned. Starting from this date on each state acquire its own sovereignty, thus conquering the political right to self-determination. Equality was established between the states, the treaty could prevent one state or external powers from intervening in the internal affairs of another state. The power was decentralized and saw the emergence of New Actors and Authorities in the Game of International Relations since the feudal system was eliminated and each state, gaining the same right to sovereignty, had sole control over its own territory. In addition, the concept of the international community (the modern European Union and United Nations) and International Security of Systemic Mechanisms was introduced which describes the prohibition of the use of force that provides the basis for future cooperation. It can technically be said that the main European states established a kind of great power's club, known as the concert of Europe, providing the basis also for all types of future negotiations used even today in decision-making.

Joachim W., *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire, Volume I from Maximilian to the Peace of Westphalia*, Oxford University Press, London, 2012, pp. 41-43

work on compromises and agreements to maintain a balance within and between their territories. Essentially, it marked the birth and the development of modern diplomacy.¹¹ There was a transition from the past diplomacy to the modern one. The latter needed to be more cooperative because the actors that were playing in the frame were increasing and they were different from each other. It was not only connected with the representation of diplomats in other countries, because it also turned into collaboration with other international organizations.¹² Undoubtedly, diplomacy is a polymorphous concept that has adapted to different social contexts becoming more interactive and elaborate, understood as a behavioral practice aimed at maximizing personal or mutual benefits between societies.¹³

A widespread activity at the heart of diplomacy is public diplomacy, a multi-disciplinary theory that focuses on communication between political entities and societies, it is a transmission that occurs always to an external audience.¹⁴ While, traditional diplomacy, aimed at moderating dialogue at a purely state level, public diplomacy refers to the strategy adopted by a governmental actor to interface with a foreign audience by providing a certain image of its own country.¹⁵ Edmund Gullion coined the expression public diplomacy in 1965, in a historical context characterized by a bipolar world where the foreign policy pursued by the Soviet Union was negatively considered propaganda and that of the United States as public diplomacy.¹⁶ It is a subject whose continuous evolution allows it to cope with social changes such as democratization, globalization, development of new technologies and participation of new non-state actors in the international arena. Public diplomacy deals with a notion far too broad and nuanced to be able to be interpreted with a simple and unique definition. The American political scientist Joseph Nye illustrates the essence of it as the mobilization of all those resources that allow a principality to enter direct communication with a foreign public rather than with governments themselves.¹⁷ Public diplomacy is understood as an autonomous subject speaking to an external audience, and it is the promotion of a foreign policy interest of a state with the goal of benefiting from it.¹⁸

¹¹ Geoff B., Maurice Keens-Soper and T. G. Otte, *Work Quoted*, pp. 2-4

¹² *Ibidem*

¹³ Fiona M. and Jason D., *Diplomatic Culture*, Handbook of Diplomacy, The Sage, London 2016 p. 105

¹⁴ Ellen H., *Public Diplomacy*, Handbook of Diplomacy, The Sage, London 2016, pp. 437-439 ¹⁵ Christer J. and Martin H., *Essence of Diplomacy*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2005, p.112 ¹⁶ Nicholas J. C., *Work Quoted*, p.17

¹⁷ Joseph N., *Public Diplomacy and Soft Power*, in the Annals of American Academy, March 2008 pp. 94-95

This is a trait that distinguishes it from traditional diplomacy. If on the one hand it is true that both are instruments for the realization of foreign policy, on the other hand public diplomacy has an outward look and, in addition, it is much younger, having spread around the 60s.¹⁹ Hence, its primary target group is foreign audiences, *is the influence of the opinions of citizens of other nations*.²⁰

Furthermore, public diplomacy comes into being through the communication of information aimed at influencing public opinion, and since it has such a wide audience, the tools used nowadays are clearly the mass media technologies.²¹ In this regard, public diplomacy is precisely the government's effort to influence the public opinion of another nation in order to benefit from the policy of the target nation.²²

1.2 Main features of public diplomacy

Beyond the definition, however, what is relevant is to analyze the vital components of public diplomacy including the cultural one. Nicholas Cull is a historian and researcher of English origins, an expert in public diplomacy.²³ In *Public Diplomacy Lessons from the Past*, Nicholas Cull, historian, and researcher expert in public diplomacy illustrates that public diplomacy is divided into five core activities, namely: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange, and international broadcasting.²⁴

Public diplomacy begins with listening. Indeed, if the goal is to persuade someone so that they can get the message that the speaker wants to convey, the talking comes later. This is the behavior in which an international actor seeks out a foreign audience and engages it, by listening rather than speaking, a phenomenon that is *much promised but rarely performed*.²⁵

In every dimension of public diplomacy, the one who can listen ensures that foreign opinion is valued in the foreign policy decision-making process.

¹⁸ Joseph N., *Work Quoted*, pp. 96-97

¹⁹ Richard L., History and evolution of diplomacy, online article, at <https://www.diplomacy.edu/resource/history-and-the-evolution-of-diplomacy/>

²⁰ Joseph N., *Work Quoted*, pp. 95-97

²¹ *Ibidem*

²² Joseph N., *Work Quoted*, p. 44

²³ Nicholas J. C., *Work Quoted.*, p.16

²⁴ *Ivi*, p.17

²⁵ *Ivi*, p. 5

It must be admitted that in today's interconnected world, new technologies facilitate linkages and the possibility of listening to and monitoring a global audience in real time. In these terms, some examples of tools used to carry out the function of listening are opinion polls, as they are capable of systematically gathering and analyzing the opinion of foreign audiences.

The second element of public diplomacy is advocacy, an activity that aims to sensitize public opinion, decision makers, and voters to drive social change through more or less visible political actions by giving voice to those who otherwise would not be able to be heard.²⁶ It is *any deliberate act to enhance the power of an organization to influence other actors in the policy making process.*²⁷ Today, advocacy management is often represented by embassies, information centers, press conferences and so on. The third component is cultural diplomacy, which represents the way in which a country seeks to extend its culture internationally hoping for benefit from other states to facilitate its transmission abroad. If a state, its representatives, or its associations are identified with a positive image of a country, it is their strengths that will be highlighted, not their shortcomings.

Cultural diplomacy is happening *without government intervention on one hand and on the other cultural diplomacy that can only take place when formal diplomats, serving national governments, try to shape and channel this natural flow to advance national interests.*²⁸ Cultural diplomacy is one-sided and does not involve any reciprocity, for example, a country that hosts the Olympics is an actor that is pursuing a philosophy of public diplomacy as opposed to an educational exchange between two overseas universities. The fourth component of public diplomacy is the cultural exchange which differs from cultural diplomacy itself because the exchange is typically and necessarily mutual. All the actors in the game share each other's values, customs, knowledge, and it is a dialectic in which it is assumed that all sides learn something new. International broadcasting, in the end, refers to the use by an agent of all those channels of information transmission such as radio, television, and now with the digital era also social media, to communicate with a foreign audience.²⁹

²⁶ Nicholas J. C., *Work Quoted*, pp. 5-6

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 11

²⁸ *Ivi*, pp. 21-22

²⁹ Nicholas J. C., *Work Quoted*, p. 21

Nowadays, information has become accessible to an increasing number of people. It is therefore crucial to connect, communicate, influence them, and make them participate in some political processes previously considered exclusive. The state in the same way must expand its borders and its contacts, it must brand itself abroad in an effective and credible way. Here, it takes over what Hans calls a *government's process of communicating with foreign audiences in an effort to bring about an understanding of its nation's ideas and ideals as well as its national goals and current policies*, namely, public diplomacy.³⁰

1.3 Cultural diplomacy

The evolution from an old to a new public diplomacy has inevitably brought with it an enrichment of vocabulary, a sort of etymological modernization whereby the terms used to express topics regarding public diplomacy derive from marketing operations such as nation branding or concepts such as soft power.³¹ These notions are fundamental, because in every nuance of public diplomacy it is essential to show the importance of the quality of attractiveness of a country. Power is the ability to get what an agent wants by influencing the behavior of another one and in order to achieve the desired outcomes, there are

several ways of shaping the recipients' actions, notably coercive with threats, resort to the imposition of payments or persuading by attraction.³² On this idea Joseph Nye, Dean of the Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, coined the term *soft power*, which is understood as the *ability to change or alter others behavior with the help of attraction rather than coercion or payment sticks and carrots*.³³

Soft power proper mechanism of influence that arises from the appeal of a country's culture, political ideals and policies. Soft power differs from it for the tangibility of the resources mobilized. Indeed, while hard power refers to military material equipment, territory, or the number of inhabitants, soft power means intangible resources such as ideas, culture, institutions, traditions, and values.³⁴

³⁰ Hans H., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, Palgrave, 2005 pp. 11-12

³¹ *Ibidem*

³² Joseph N., *Work Quoted*, p.2

³³ *Ibidem*

³⁴ Joseph N., *Work Quoted*, p.5

It is built into people's perceptions and cultural diplomacy is a key part of this mechanism. Cultural diplomacy is developed without *governmental contamination*. It should rather be regarded as the means by which, through continuous contacts between peoples and nations, a mutual basis of understanding can be created, and subsequently the establishment of political relations can then be made possible. It is connected with the world of art, languages, religions, and traditions and it aims to harness the salient features of a country's culture and project them onto the international arena to facilitate its transmission abroad. Additionally, soft power can offset negative impressions of governments which may derive from negative or distorted perceptions explaining cultural aspects that are sometimes otherwise poorly understood by the interlocutors of a country. In this sense, culture can be a channel that can shape the foreign policy. This was the case for jazz music, during the Cold War years which was a way for some U.S musicians to travel to the then Soviet Union despite the poor diplomatic relations and the supposedly nonexistent dialogues between the two superpowers of the bipolar world.³⁵ Cultural diplomacy contributes to the branding of a country, promotes its national interests, and is capable of filling certain gaps or weaknesses of states.

Azerbaijan, in its cultural relations with France, will be the case study of this dissertation. Culturally, the country has much to offer having historically been a meeting point of numerous people's ethnicities. Taking advantage of this element to position itself under international attention promotes it as a country that strives for *the rapprochement of peoples on the basis of universal spiritual values and mutual understanding*.³⁶

Therefore, the promotion of national cultural heritage in the world through cultural exchanges, exhibitions, and displays are among the priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.

³⁵ Billy P., *How the U.S. Used Jazz as a Cold War Secret Weapon*, in Time Online Journal at: <https://time.com/5056351/cold-war-jazz-ambassadors/>

³⁶ AIDA, Azerbaijan Development International Agency, *Azerbaijan's cultural diplomacy: at the service of national interests*, at: https://aida.mfa.gov.az/en/articles_centenary/279/

II CHAPTER

FRANCE - AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS

2.1 Azerbaijan's independence and establishment of diplomatic relations with France

After freeing itself from Soviet oppression that had held sway over Azerbaijan and other 14 republics for more than 70 years, the country declared its independence on August 30, 1991.¹ France was one of the first countries in the world to recognize this status and to establish diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan after a few months. In March 1992, after Turkey, France opened a representative embassy in Baku, and it sent during the same year a delegation headed by Bernard Kushner, the then Secretary of State for Humanitarian Affairs, who would remain in the capital until 1993.² This can be said to be the year when the French-Azerbaijani collaboration witnessed an escalation; the then newly elected President Heydar Aliyev, one of the country's founding fathers, began a political campaign that would have enabled the protection and international recognition of Azerbaijan's independence by building a strong network of relations.

The first country from which he began his European tour was exactly France, the country to which Heydar Aliyev paid special attention:

*We will do everything in the future to develop multifaceted cooperation between Azerbaijan and France, to make the most of the opportunities created now for the better representation of Azerbaijan in France.*³

Indeed, being one of the founding countries of the European Union and one of the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council, France has always played a central role in Europe, and it has attracted Azerbaijan's attention to entertain political, economic, and

¹ Ismail B. Z., *The History of Azerbaijan*, pp. 477-479

² Republic of Azerbaijan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Online at: <https://mfa.gov.az/en/category/europe/french>

³ Salima S. G., *The first official visit of national leader Heydar Aliyev to France is an important factor in building cooperation between Azerbaijan and France*, in *History and Archeology – archival studies*, Vol. The challenges in science of nowadays, p. 679

diplomatic relations. So, Azerbaijan's president began the project of internationalization of Azerbaijan's policy starting from France, where he met the French President Francois Mitterrand and the Foreign Minister Alain Juppe. During this consultation, they had the opportunity to exchange views, opinions and discuss long-term cooperation through the signing of treaties and agreements. Their negotiations led to the formalization of the *Agreement of friendship, mutual understanding, and cooperation* which is still considered the starting point of Franco-Azerbaijani relations.⁴

In any case, one of the most significant moments for the cooperation between the two countries was the signing by President Azerbaijan of the Paris Charter for a New Europe. It was a document which dated back to the end of the 1990 CSCE extraordinary summit, and it marked the end of the Cold War together with the division of Europe, and which became one of the most important international conventions.

In this regard, the French president stated:

*This document will be an important step in the development of the French-Azerbaijani relations, it determines the frames of our future bilateral and multilateral cooperation. We mean the cooperation in the field of politics, economy, culture, science, and technology, as well as in the efforts for ensuring security. And it proves our joint efforts for the expansion of our limited contacts.*⁵

This visit also allowed France to emphasize its closeness to Azerbaijan in terms of support for its territorial integrity regarding the work of the Minsk Group, which France still co- chairs with Russia and the US. The group was formed in 1992 to mediate the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict following the 1990 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) to encourage a peaceful and negotiated settlement of this war.

*France followed closely the expansion of the Karabakh conflict and expressed its regret that the peaceful population suffered there. We help this population and shall increase our help. He said that they are against the forcible alteration of borders and at the same time, solution of the conflict by using force. We respect the independence and sovereignty of Azerbaijan. We proposed to convene an international conference within the frames of CSCE.*⁶

⁴ Salima S. G., *Work Quoted*, p. 679

⁵ *President of the Azerbaijan Republic Heydar Aliyev met President of France Fransua Mitterrand - 20 December 1993*, Heydar Aliyev Online Library at: <https://lib.aliyevheritage.org/en/707767.html>

Without going into the issue of the conflict in detail, it is necessary to provide some details in order to better understand the relations between France and Azerbaijan and its foreign politics. In 1998, following the perestroika reform instituted by Gorbachev, it began to emerge a phase of nationalist sentiments among the countries under the control of the USSR.⁷ Examples in this sense include Georgia, Ukraine, and Armenia, where the growth of national claim was catalyzed. In Armenia, as well as Azerbaijan, the territory of Karabakh embodied this assertion.⁸

In this conflict two principles of international law are claimed, namely the right to self-determination of peoples on the Armenian side and the right to territorial integrity on the Azerbaijani side. What is important to keep in mind is that this conflict was and still is decisive in the construction of the national identity narrative for both countries, and it has been crucially on the regional level. It has been an almost 30-year clash characterized by warm and frozen phases which ended in November 2020, with Azerbaijan taking back 7 occupied districts surrounding the Karabakh oblast itself and stationing Russian peacekeeping forces in those territories.⁹

This conflict turned out to be decisive in the articulation of France-Azerbaijan relations due to the narrative of the strong Armenian diaspora in France, which makes the Baku-Paris dialogue even more strenuous. This point, however, will be explored in the last chapter.

2.2 An even older relation

With Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev's 1993 visit to France, relations between the two countries have grown and matured to the present time. The opening of the Azerbaijani embassy in Paris in late 1994, the invitation by French President Jacques Chirac to the Azerbaijani President in France in 1997, and the visit of President Ilham Aliyev in 2007 at the invitation of Nicholas Sarkozy for economic cooperation are just some of the milestones in this now decade-long partnership.¹⁰

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ Ismail B. Z., *Work Quoted*, pp. 477-480

⁸ *Ibidem*

⁹ *The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: visual explainer*, The International Crisis Group, Online at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/content/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-visual-explainer>

In fact, it should be noted that today there are many French companies investing in Azerbaijan's oil industry, including TOTAL, which signed a Production Sharing Agreement with the Azerbaijan national oil company SOCAR in 2009.¹¹ Not only hydrocarbons, but also trade, telecommunications, education, culture, and several other aspects of political, economic, and social life sees Baku-Paris dialectical collaboration. In any case, it is interesting to point out that the Franco-Azerbaijani relations have their roots well before 1993.

For a brief interlude in its history, straddling the end of the Russian Empire and the beginning of Soviet occupation, Azerbaijan enjoyed its own independence for which it was known as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic from May 1918 to April 1920.¹² Azerbaijan immediately began working to gain recognition of Azerbaijani independence internationally.

In light of this, an extraordinary work was carried out by the outstanding services rendered by Azerbaijan politician, foreign minister, and speaker of the Parliament Alimardan bey Topchubashov, who played a crucial role in the history of Azerbaijan diplomacy.¹³ He was a leading figure, responsible for conducting active negotiations abroad, presenting materials on history, culture, economic resources, and relations with neighboring countries of his own motherland. His work was instrumental in building relations with the European continent and France in particular. Indeed, the end of World War I saw in Paris the holding of all negotiations geared to draw up a peace between the countries involved in the conflict. This was an opportunity for the newly independent republic of Azerbaijan to present itself to the world. Thanks to the work of the diplomatic mission headed by Topchubashov, the delegation actively promoted their country's political and economic interests, especially urging recognition and guarantees of security.

Effectively from this summit, Azerbaijan succeeded in the intent it had set itself., *Il Bulletin d'information de l'Azerbaïdjan* wrote:

¹⁰ Ilham Aliyev Heritage, Online Library at: <https://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/print.php?lang=en&page=178352>

¹¹ Commercial Relations between Azerbaijan and France at: https://it.frwiki.wiki/wiki/Relations_entre_l%27Azerba%C3%AFdjan_et_la_France

¹² Ismail B. Z., *Work Quoted*, pp. 422-423

¹³ *Ivi*, p. 426

The Supreme Council at one of its last sessions recognized the de facto independence of the Caucasian Republics: Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia. The delegation of Azerbaijan and Georgia had been informed of this decision by M. Jules Cambon at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 15, 1920.¹⁴

Shortly thereafter the Bolsheviks took Baku and Azerbaijan came under Soviet rule. Topchubashov was never able to return home and died in Paris, where he is still buried today in Saint-Claude Cemetery.

In conclusion, relations between Azerbaijan and France certainly saw an escalation thanks to President Heydar Aliyev's visit in 1993, but it was not the real first point of contact. As early as the early 1920s Baku and Paris had known each other diplomatically.

Although the relations between the two countries are deep and historically long-lived, it does not mean that it is free of rifts; on the contrary, often, for reasons related to the Karabakh issue, dissonances are numerous and accentuated especially in the political dialogue of these two interlocutors. This makes the institutional relations between France and Azerbaijan rough.

¹⁴ Shabnam Y., *The recognition of the independence of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in Paris Peace Conference and the attitude of Iran*, in *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, August 2014 file:///C:/Users/utente/Downloads/The_Recognition_Of_The_Independence_Of_Azerbaijan_.pdf

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE FRENCH-AZERBAIJANI RELATION

The great spenders in cultural diplomacy have been the French, who have heavily subsidized an international network of schools to sustain the French language, understanding that their prestige and influence is largely tied to the survival of the “francophonie”.¹

3.1 Communication friction

The link between the Azerbaijani and French realities, in terms of modern politics, dates back to last century as one of the first points of contact dates to the Paris Conferences of 1919. However, during this long-time frame Azerbaijan-France relations have fluctuated with relatively harmonious moments and more hostile ones. At the root of this communication, that can be described as a "*hiccups-dialogue*", there is the issue related to the war in Karabakh.

As noted in Chapter II in the Second Karabakh War, which ended in November 2021, the main actors were the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia. The very latter witnesses a special connection with France from a historical and religious point of view between 400,000 and 600,000 of people of Armenian origin are currently living in France. This strong Armenian presence in the French state makes the communication between Baku and Paris edgy. Armenians have contributed, and still does, to French arts, letters, politics and commerce, the Christian religion has been an important “glue” throughout the history of both countries, and even in 2001 the Paris parliament voted a law to officially recognize the Armenian genocide.

The culmination of their connection was reached and manifested exactly during the Second Karabakh War, when, The French Senate, at the urging of the National Assembly, voted for a resolution recognizing Armenian sovereignty over the Karabakh enclave, which was not

¹ Nicholas J. C., *Work Quoted*, p. 20

approved, however, by Foreign Minister Le Drian.²

This caused moments of high friction with Azerbaijan, fueled moreover by the humanitarian aid plan that Paris has financed for Yerevan. Although at the end of the fighting the French President Emmanuel Macron explained *his readiness to build a fair, lasting and acceptable political solution for all parties in Nagorno-Karabakh*³, there have been growing calls for him to renounce the French position in the Minsk Group, given France's ambiguous and impartial behaviors. Indeed, the neutrality that should have been shown by France as a co-chair member of Minsk's Group failed as did the group itself according to Didier Billion, Deputy Director of the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs who said, that, *The Minsk Group, as it was created, is dead. Whether we like it or not, Vladimir Putin played a masterful game and the Turks also scored.*⁴

It follows that on the institutional level, today the France-Azerbaijan relationship is tense and hostile and, even though it was the first destination for the Heydar Aliyev European tour of 1993, nowadays the country no longer represents that privileged channel to the European dimension. Indeed, considering the end of the Second Karabakh conflict, the situation is more tense and critical, given the positions taken by France during the fighting and negotiations.

Thus, despite inevitable economic and political ties and relations, being France still a recognized world power, especially in the European scene, and the centuries-old relations, the communication with Azerbaijan has been and still is often disturbed.

² France struggles to retain Karabakh sway after Armenia defeat, in France 24 Online Newspaper at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201127-france-struggles-to-retain-karabakh-sway-after-armenia-defeat>

³ *Macron Says France Ready To Help Build Lasting Solution To Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Radio Free Europe Online Journal at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/macron-france-ready-lasting-solution-karabakh-conflict/30946318.html>

⁴ *France struggles to retain Karabakh sway after Armenia defeat*, in France 24 Online Newspaper at: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20201127-france-struggles-to-retain-karabakh-sway-after-armenia-defeat>

3.2 Culture is moving forward

In the application of public diplomacy strategies, culture is a strength for Azerbaijan, which seems, as in the French case, to be proceeding in parallel with traditional policy by trying to overcome those limitations that institutional dialogue often poses. Indeed, the central focus of this paper is that, while the political narrative based on a purely institutional point of view is difficult and often edgy, from the cultural perspective the Azerbaijan France relations proceed quite smoothly with remarkable success.

Multiculturalism is a hallmark of Azerbaijani identity and politics⁵, so its tendency to accept and embrace the culture of others is the central point on which its diplomatic communication is based. As per the definition, cultural diplomacy is developed without "governmental contamination" through continuous contacts between peoples and nations. It can create a mutual basis of understanding for which the establishment of political relations is then made possible.

Having historically been a meeting point of numerous people's ethnicities, Azerbaijan has much to offer, therefore it takes good advantage of this element to position itself in the international arena.

Accordingly, the promotion of national cultural heritage in the world through cultural exchanges, exhibitions, and displays are among the priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy which also applies in the relation with France. Cultural diplomacy policies in Azerbaijan are mainly pursued by a non-governmental organization, named the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, and established in 2004, was created with the aim of socially and internationally promoting Azerbaijan's cultural heritage, *because the dissemination of national cultural heritage around the world and the promotion of cultural exchanges are among the priorities of Azerbaijan's foreign policy at a new stage of its development.*⁶ The organization, which features First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva as its chairwoman, is named after one of the founding fathers of Azerbaijan, the third President of the Republic Heydar Aliyev. The Foundation

⁵ Fazil H., *Multiculturalism in Azerbaijan: Multiculturalism in architecture, art and social life*, in Azerbaijani Multiculturalism Presidential Online Library at: https://multiculturalism.preslib.az/en_others-hpt5PRUsV3.html

⁶ S. Agayeva, UNESCO Director General Hopes Icherisheher to be Excluded from List of Culture Heritage under Threat at: <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/1199849.htm>

carries out many volunteering actions, restorations activities, seminars, and education assistance to the vulnerable groups of population both locally and globally.

The Palace of Versailles in Paris is one main example in the dialogue with France. Indeed, in 2007 the Foundation carried out the restoration work related to the window tiles and some of the sculptures in the plexus.⁷ In addition, in many French cities such as Cannes or Paris the Azerbaijani village was often installed to show French society a small Baku, in the case of the capital, right next to the Tour Eiffel.⁸ Then exhibitions for the dissemination of Azerbaijani culture, the carpet art, and the projection of Azerbaijan as "land of fire" were promoted in Paris, in April 2011 thanks to the work of the Aliyev Foundation.⁹

The organization itself said that dialoguing with its French counterpart is often complicated, but when the focus shifts to cultural projects, communication takes a different turn.¹⁰ Additionally, it should be highlighted how culture was involved to celebrate the 30th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between France and Azerbaijan. This was done with the inauguration of a photographic exhibition by the worldwide famous photographer Reza Deghati at the Heydar Aliyev Center. He stated that *bringing together France and Azerbaijan through this exhibition was a very significant theme*.¹¹ While stressing that he was of Azerbaijani descent, Reza added he knew the French people very well. Through this exhibition, he wanted *to show to both the Azeris and the French, that these two countries had a lot in common and that this occasion was a kind of bridge*.¹²

⁷ *The Versailles Palace*, The Heydar Aliyev Foundation at: <https://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view/136/1977/The-Versailles-Palace>

⁸ *Village d'Azerbaijan - 2016 in Paris*, The Heydar Aliyev Foundation at: <https://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view/120/4373/Village-d%E2%80%99Azerbaijan--2016-in-Paris>

⁹ *Contemporary works of Azerbaijan, the Land of Fire*, The Heydar Aliyev Foundation at: <https://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view/140/1968/An-exhibition-entitled-%E2%80%9CContemporary-works-of-Azerbaijan-the-Land-of-Fire%E2%80%9D-in-Paris>

¹⁰ Interview at the Responsible person of International Relations Department at Heydar Aliyev Foundation

¹¹ *Photo-exhibition entitled "Reza's Inner Odyssey" opens at Heydar Aliyev Center*, Azertac Online Newspaper at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Photo_exhibition_entitled_Rezas_Inner_Odyssey_opens_at_Heydar_Aliyev_Center-2198249

¹² *Photo-exhibition entitled "Reza's Inner Odyssey" opens at Heydar Aliyev Center*, Azertac Online Newspaper at: https://azertag.az/en/xeber/Photo_exhibition_entitled_Rezas_Inner_Odyssey_opens_at_Heydar_Aliyev_Center-2198249

From the bottom-up perspective, there are other cultural initiatives, especially in education, that touch the country directly in its diplomatic component. One of these is the establishment of the French-Azerbaijani University UFAZ, which is a joint study program project between the University of Strasbourg and Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University established in 2016. Not to mention the cultural exchanges, Erasmus projects that French universities have with Azerbaijan. First among them is ADA University, which currently has seen numerous students coming from institutions located in Paris, Lille, Lyon, Nantes and likewise sending their students there. It is interesting to look at the relations between France and Azerbaijan from the perspective of civil society because the hostilities of the political dialogue don't seem to emerge. Namira for example, an Azerbaijani exchange student who was in Lille commented *I describe this experience with 3 words - peace, courage, and curiosity. I am even planning to move to Lille. Definitely every person should have this experience.*¹³ Clearly there is no shortage of difficulties, but also Teresa, from Lyon at ADA, affirms that she felt like she *was living in a dream where everyone is super nice*, and that Azerbaijan is *an open and welcoming society.*¹⁴

Therefore, the culture is one of the central elements for Azerbaijan's foreign policy and has had a major impact on the field of International Relation for the visibility, reputation, and communication dialogue with the French reality besides the institutions.

¹³ Interview to ADA exchange student from Baku at Lille University, Namira Aslanova

¹⁴ Interview to Lyon University student from Lyon at ADA University, Teresa François

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this paper was to illustrate the relation between Azerbaijan and France from a macro perspective, examining how it has been articulated historically and what the subsequent political-diplomatic implications have been, placing the focus on the cultural sphere.

In pursuing this intent, the work was developed on a deductive methodology that from the general concept of public diplomacy, its components, particularly the one of cultural diplomacy, arrives to discuss the specificities of the case of the Azerbaijani French relations. In light of this analysis, what emerged is that often the dialogue between these two countries on the institutional level is fraught with pitfalls and seems to encounter numerous difficulties.

Indeed, although the Franco-Azerbaijani bond in terms of modern politics sees its birth around a century ago, the collaboration between the two countries has not always been smooth, and it has often been marked by moments of disagreement.

Clearly France is a country that enjoys a certain weight within the European and world context therefore it is inevitable that economic, political, and diplomatic relations exist between Paris and Baku. The reason why on several occasions the two countries have experienced more hostile moments lies in the Karabakh War fought between Azerbaijan and Armenia, where the latter enjoys excellent relations with France. Given the weight of the Armenian diaspora in France, which accounts between 400 and 600 thousand of Armenians residing in France, Azerbaijan's ties with France can be considered sometimes though.

What this paper considers, however, is that while on the diplomatic and institutional side the Franco-Azerbaijani bond is often edgy, the cultural one proceeds smoothly. Azerbaijan is nestled between Europe and Asia and has historically been the cradle of many civilizations. Therefore, it is used to embrace different cultures, customs, and ethnicities. This characteristic allowed its relations with France to be able to overcome those obstacles present in the political field. Azerbaijan in the fulfillment of this action uses public diplomacy tools such as NGOs like, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation or cultural exchanges

between universities. These are both elements of public diplomacy, which fall under the component of the cultural sphere.

In conclusion, this paper explored how in some situations the role of culture, and the consequent use of a country's public diplomacy, in this case the Azerbaijan-France case, can be a connecting bridge for smoother and more fluid communication, even when the institutional area turns out to be full of obstacles.

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Interview to Department's responsible of Heydar Aliyev Foundation International

Relations Interview to Namira Aslanova, ADA student

Interview to Jeyhun Gasimzada, ADA student Interview to Teresa Franois, Lyon

student Interview to Huseyn Hasankhan, ADA student Interview to Anais Moaven Paris

University student Interview to Emin Bayramli, ADA student

About the author:

Federica is an Italian master's student of International Compared Relations at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. She received her BA from the International, Social and Political Relations faculty at the University of Bologna. Federica participated in the youth exchange program in Spain. She also has experience with a European Parliament simulation organized by ELSA Association.

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