

Governing Abroad: France's external audiovisual strategies

From turn of C20, France developed a world-leading complex of institutions devoted to outward-facing cultural action.

But after WW2, traditional vectors of cultural influence marginalized by newer communicational instruments

And especially after 1980s and early 1990s...

By period 2002-2012 France might have appeared in good position as regards electronic media as well:

2002: spending 211 million euros on outward-facing electronic media

2007: spending 300 million euros

In terms of State investment, third behind USA (445 M €) and UK (420 M€);
just ahead of *Deutsche Welle* (282ME)

But..... apparatus developing through accumulation: question of coherence....

Component 1: *TV5 Monde*

Established 1984

'Multilateral' francophone venture (originally with Wallonia's RTBF and Switzerland's SSR; joined from 1986 by Quebec)

Monolingual; 'indirect' projection

(Multilateral make-up was originally tactical rather than strategic)

By 2004, TV5 second most widely distributed international network

Available to 137 homes; cumulative weekly viewing figures 39 million

But recurrent frustrations:

France pays around 80% of its costs (some 64 million euros in 2002)

But French government has very limited capacity to steer it in line with its direct interests

Component 2: *Radio France Internationale*

Originally established 1974 but turned into autonomous 'société nationale de programme' in 1986

National programme... but needs not to be seen simply as 'voice of France'...

Generally seen as credible medium

High listening figures for global station (26 million in 2006); and very high in francophone Africa (26 million)

Multilingual provision... but influence outside francophone zones limited

Other components:

Canal France International (CFI): set up 1989 as 'bank' of French television programming essentially for developing nations.

Became a television station in its own right, but this ceased in 2003 (was competing with TV5)

Arte: Franco-German 'cultural' channel (initiated 1986 under different name)

Euronews: launched 1993

Headquarters Lyon; *France Télévisions* owns 25% of capital.... But the rest split between 18 other countries.

Faced with this mosaic, successive reports since late 1980s argue for greater focus and coordination

France hadn't opted for single outward-facing media platform (contrast BBC or *Deutsche Welle*)

After Decaux report of 1989, a *Conseil de l'audiovisuel extérieur* set up – but ceased to meet after 1995

Overall control for outward-facing media and cultural policy resides with Ministry for Foreign Affairs ... but has been of limited potency for coordination.

By 2002, sense of fragmented or diminished French presence on stages of globalized media:

Weakness in export of audiovisual content

Failed global strategies of companies like Vivendi Universal, Canal+ and Lagardère (Chalaby speaks of 'French crash')

While global media airwaves increasingly saturated by channels both commercial and public

And no French dedicated global news channel...

Since 1980s, persistent stream of recommendations for dedicated French global news channel (Decaux report, 1989), or at least news provision (Balle report 1996)

Chirac was set to launch a global news station (Téléfi) in 1997, as recommended by Jean-Paul Cluzel

This scrapped after 1997 elections (Hubert Védrine in 1998: the creation of a 'French-style CNN' would be too 'expensive and problematic')

1998: TV5 makes news a priority in its programming

Feb 2002: Chirac reasserts need for provision of French global news channel

Enfin, est-il compréhensible qu'année après année, nous en soyons encore à déplorer les insuffisances persistantes de l'information et de l'audiovisuel francophone sur la scène mondiale ? Certes, nous disposons avec l'agence France Presse d'un remarquable outil d'information qu'il nous faut conforter sans cesse, notamment dans sa vocation mondiale. Certes, chacun s'entend à reconnaître les progrès récents accomplis par RFI, par TV5, par CFI, grâce aux efforts de leurs équipes et à la détermination des pouvoirs publics. Mais chacun constate que nous sommes encore loin de disposer d'une grande chaîne d'information internationale en français, capable de rivaliser avec la BBC ou CNN. Et les crises récentes ont montré le handicap que subissent un pays, une aire culturelle, qui ne disposent pas d'un poids suffisant dans la bataille de l'image et des ondes. Interrogeons-nous, à l'heure des réseaux hertziens, du satellite, de l'internet, sur notre organisation dans ce domaine et notamment par l'éparpillement des moyens publics qui lui sont consacrés.

Cette ambition culturelle extérieure suppose, c'est l'évidence, des moyens accrus. C'est un problème constant. La France, ne peut pas mener en première ligne le combat pour l'exception culturelle et la diversité des cultures sans faire de l'action audiovisuelle, culturelle et linguistique extérieure une priorité.

(Chirac 2002)

Legitimacy of channel underscored in run-up to Iraq war early 2003 (notably when standing applause for Dominique de Villepin's speech to UN Assembly not broadcast on CNNI)

De Villepin's address to parliamentary commission two months later:

C'est le président de la République lui-même qui nous a donné cette feuille de route dès février 2002, anticipant cette nécessité que nous avons tous ressentie et que l'actualité récente est venue rendre encore plus impérieuse. La question n'est plus de savoir s'il faut le faire, mais comment le faire. Pourquoi la France doit-elle lancer une chaîne d'information internationale ? Dans les rapports de force internationaux, la bataille des images et de l'information prend une place déterminante.

C'est ce que l'on appelle aujourd'hui "la diplomatie d'influence" : les grandes batailles, avant de se gagner sur le terrain ou autour du tapis vert, se gagnent d'abord dans les opinions et donc dans l'arène des moyens de communication de masse. Sur la scène internationale, la télévision est désormais partie prenante de l'événement. Elle interagit avec lui et a même acquis le pouvoir de le créer ou de le nier selon ce qu'elle montre ou non. La crise irakienne nous en offre une illustration exemplaire : les caméras de télévision sont entrées au Conseil de sécurité, mettant la diplomatie en interaction directe et instantanée avec l'opinion mondiale ; le renversement de la statue de Saddam Hussein a marqué les opinions mieux que tout communiqué officiel.

Pour être un acteur majeur de la scène internationale, un pays doit disposer de sa propre capacité de projection d'images dans le monde. Nous voulons organiser un monde multipolaire, l'offre audiovisuelle doit en être un reflet.

For Villepin, the 'message' of France for the world based on three 'pillars'

Projection of Europe in the world

Francophonie

Universal values of reason and cultural dialogue

New channel imagined as a solid platform, driven top-down by president and senior ministers...

But struggles around domestic power-seekers to shape the new instrument...

Deadline of April 2003 for bids. 3 received:

- a) France Télévisions and RFI
- b) TF1 – extension of its news channel LCI
- c) Canal + - a station to mesh with its own *iTélé*

National Assembly commission recommending a further option based predominantly on public audiovisual institutions

All these rejected....

Brochand report of 2003 (prearranged)

Proposes 50/50 split between France Télévisions and TF1

Why?? (favours to TF1...)

Many tensions in planning phases.

TF1's stake finally bought out in 2008 (2 million euros for an initial outlike of 18,500 euros)

Other sources of division: management at TV5 and staff at RFI express worries about the 'competition' that the new channel will bring – further unsettling of France's outward-facing media platform

2006: New channel named France 24

Launched in December 2006 (French and English)

From March 2007 in Arabic

Nov 2008: Sarkozy's advisor on cultural and audiovisual matters Georges-March Benamou criticising (again) dispersed and unfocused character of France's global media framework.

2008: Creation of new holding company *Audiovisuel Extérieur de la France* (holding 49% of TV5 and all of France 24 and RFI)

2009 audiovisual law: AEF named a 'société nationale de programme', whose head directly appointed by Sarkozy

That head was Alain de Poulzihac, chief at the time of France 24 (and previously of Havas)

Deputy head appointed: Christine Ockrent (veteran journalist and wife of foreign minister Bertrand Kouchner) – to be *directrice générale déléguée* of AEF and *directrice générale* of France 24

Further fragmentation!!

AEF had to be put under tutelage of General Directorate for Media and Cultural Industries (itself under Minister for Culture)

In addition to this, Poulzihac-Ockrent tandem turned into very public 'dyarchie assassine': degrading instead of promoting image of France

Even after Ockrent's departure (May 2011), problems persisted: Prime Minister had to ask Inspection Générale des Finances to inspect accounts, as did not trust Poulzihac's projections

AEF's ownership of TV5 producing diplomatic 'crisis'

Poulzihac's fusion of AEF, RFI and France 24 produced massive unrest and discontent among journalists (finally unwound when Hollande became president).

Could all be seen as stuff of personal anecdote and hubris, but reflected also something more structural. Note Balle's diagnosis back in 1996:

Dans ce concert [of all the different bodies and players in the world of French outward-facing media as they stood in 1995], chaque opérateur joue au gré des circonstances sa carte personnelle en recherchant les appuis tactiques et stratégiques des différentes administrations centrales qui participent à la définition de la politique audiovisuelle extérieure, quand il ne s'agit pas des jeux d'influences basées sur les affinités personnelles ou politiques des dirigeants avec le monde politique. (Balle et al., 1996, p. 85)

Finally rechristened as France Médias Monde in 2013

Bringing together but not fusing France 24 and RFI (+ its radio affiliates)

Put under direction of Marie-Christine Saragosse (extensive experience in managing audiovisual media)

AEF's holding in TV5 transferred to *France Télévisions*