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# The Role of the Institute for Political Studies in French-Serbian Scientific Cooperation and Cultural Diplomacy<sup>[2]</sup>

**Abstract:** The Francophonie is extremely important for the development not only of “cultural diplomacy”, but also of increasingly broader scientific cooperation, implementation of joint projects, activities and exchange of knowledge with the Republic of Serbia, as well as the whole region of the Western Balkans. The research is aimed at determining the scope, results as well as perspectives of the cooperation between the Institute for Political Studies, as one of the most outstanding actors in scientific, expert and cultural relations, and French scientific-research and educational institutions. In the research preparation, the author used the content analysis and limited observation with participation. In conclusion, Serbia is one of the key countries in the region for building scientific cooperation with France and, with rather limited funds allocated to social sciences and humanities en générale, the Institute for Political Studies manages to maintain the image of good partner through its exchange of knowledge, publications and implementation of joint project activities.

**Keywords:** French Republic, Republic of Serbia, Institute for Political Studies, cultural diplomacy, scientific cooperation

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## Introduction

The end of the Cold War brought the whole world into a zone of uncertainty, but also of hope that the atrocities of all great wars, including those territorially limited ones, would never repeat. However,

in the past few years, we have witnessed that the rattling of weapons and the revival of military alliances among countries has once again become popular. Are interstate relations measured only by comparing their nuclear and other weapons, military capacities and power, or is still possible for

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the countries to cooperate in the fields of culture, science and common progress? The French state, although a nuclear power, one of the leading countries of the European Union, but also an important factor in world's politics, has always had a strong cultural and scientific influence in the world thanks to its use of cultural diplomacy for increasing its impact and improving international relations.

The Western Balkan countries, particularly Serbia, have undergone almost three decades of the transitioning period, during which they have tried to overcome the breakup of the single Yugoslav state, to leave completely the communist milieu, and to join the European Union, for the purpose of modernization and keeping pace with the modern world. For such changes, it was necessary to find partners so that the vital domains of the country, including education, technological development and science, gained a special place and could uninterruptedly progress and develop. Owing to historical relations, the influence of the Francophonie, French culture, but also to the decades-long experience of the French state in the field of education and science, Serbia began and/or continued its cooperation with France. Bilateral relations of these two countries were recovered not only due to Serbia's efforts to return to the European tracks, but also due to France's opening and its revived interest in developing cultural diplomacy with Serbia and the rest of the region.

Scientific and cultural cooperation has enabled the development of so-called cultural and/or scientific diplomacy. Scientific diplomacy gained its modern form and taxonomy in 2009 and was classified into: 1) science in diplomacy (as an advisory instrument for improving foreign policy goals); 2)

diplomacy for science (diplomacy facilitating and improving international scientific cooperation); 3) science for diplomacy (scientific cooperation which improves bilateral and international political relations) (Turekian, Gluckman, Kishi, & Grimes, 2017, p. 2). The instruments of implementing scientific diplomacy are most simply reduced to scientific cooperation through mobility of students and professors, and exchange of knowledge and experience (Fähnrich, 2015). Here it must be added that in the past few years, the most important form of cooperation has been the implementation of joint projects and, within them, the organization of scientific conferences, panels, co-publication of papers, visits and workshops. This enables not only institutional cooperation and exchange of experience, but also individual contacts are made, which is of great importance particularly to young researchers. How important cultural and scientific diplomacy are for spreading French influence and enhancing so-called *soft power* throughout the world is proved by Sylvie Retailleau's speech in the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs in 2023. She says that 65% of all scientific publications in France are prepared in cooperation with foreign researchers, and that in 2022 as many as 400,000 foreign students began their higher education in France, which ranks it as the sixth most desirable destination for academic specialization worldwide (Kolaković, 2023, p. 13).

One of the scientific-research organizations in Serbia that has recognized the potential of Serbian-French scientific relations and builds them selflessly through joint activities, publications, projects, visits and programs, is the Institute for Political Studies in Belgrade. For almost 60 years

since its foundation, thanks to dozens of employed researchers, the Institute for Political Studies has established itself as one of the leading scientific-research institutions in Serbia. Given the broad sphere of social sciences and humanities, particularly political, historical and sociological, the Institute has built an image of a reliable partner in creating and analyzing national public policies. Moreover, the Institute is now increasingly recognized as the leader in establishing new or renewing former international scientific relations, as was the case with French higher education institutions and other non-academic organizations.

The aim of this paper is to answer the question as to the scope of cooperation between the Institute for Political Studies and its French partners, what this form of scientific diplomacy implies, and what the perspectives of these relations are. As a participant of certain activities in Serbian-French scientific cooperation, the author applied the content analysis, as well as limited observation with participation. The paper consists of four segments. After introductory considerations, the cooperation is presented through bibliography that is related to France in various domains. Most frequently those are scientific papers which offer new views of important events, as well as discoveries in the domain of shared history, development of cultural, economic and regional cooperation, as well as the perceptions of the shared future. Below is the overview of joint project activities, and the author's polemics and conclusion of the paper by the hypothesis about the potentials of Serbian-French scientific relations.

## Publications of the Institute for Political Studies – the reflection of French-Serbian scientific cooperation

The activities of the Institute for Political Studies can be perfectly monitored on the basis of the publications with thematically different, but quite interesting and significant perspectives and views of Serbian-French relations. An interesting fact is that in the past few years many published scientific papers, monographs and special editions of scientific journals<sup>[3]</sup> have been dedicated to historical ties between these two countries. Particularly popular are those publications referring to current diplomatic relations, cooperation in different domains, as well as potential proposals and ideas of future cooperation.

Among the above-mentioned publications, the journal *Serbian Political Thought (Srpska politička misao)* stands out. According to the list of categorized scientific journals published in Serbia, it has the category of M24 (MNTRI, 2023, p. 43). Given the scope of the manuscript, the author will present only some interesting topics and articles in which the Institute for Political Studies is singled out not only as an important factor in the strengthening and construction of Serbian-French relations, but also as a necessary partner in the deepening of regional good neighbourly relations which France, as it has already been mentioned, appreciates to a large extent.

One of the interesting volumes of the journal *Serbian Political Thought*, in the form of a special

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[3] The bibliography of the Institute for Political Studies can be found on the website of the Repository of the Institute, available at: <http://repositorijumips.rs/>.

edition, was published in 2018. This edition did not only crown the activities of the joint project of Serbian and French researchers, “French-Serbian relations in the domain of diplomacy and media representation: Historical experience and contemporary challenges” (No. 451-03-01963/2017-09/07), but it symbolically came to the light of day on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Institute’s foundation, in the year that marked the beginning of celebrating another anniversary – 180 years from the establishment of Serbian-French diplomatic relations (MSP, 2019).

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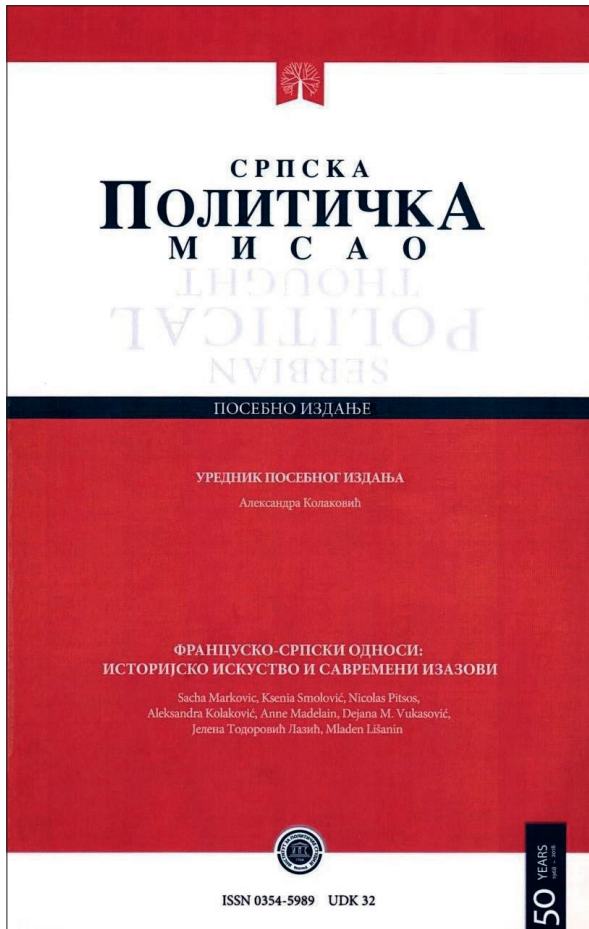
By examining this special edition of the journal, a number of scientific papers can be observed written both by Serbian scientists from the Institute for Political Studies, and by French scientists from Sorbonne University. The thematic collection encompasses important papers which in one place sum up the relations between these two countries with all diplomatic rises and falls. The introductory paper speaks exactly about the French press before the Congress of Berlin in 1878, which did not consider favourably full independence of Serbia, Montenegro and Romania. On the contrary, the French press published a number of “anti-Slavic” texts, to say the least, aimed at protecting the already weakened Ottoman Empire and insisting on the so-called Serbian and Montenegrin aggression and Orthodox Slavic violence against the Turks (Markovic, 2019, p. 7). These were followed by the texts about French reactions to the regicide in 1903, as well as the position of French society and state towards Serbia’s territorial expansion during the Balkan Wars. The originality of these papers is reflected in the content analysis of the daily newspapers of the time, which openly showed the position of the public towards

the Serbian and Montenegrin people, as well as the data from the formerly unpublished archive documents and diplomatic correspondence. A special historical and political-scientific contribution of these papers derives from the fact that from the examples of other countries, even at that time it was possible to see the ideological polarization of France. Specifically, from the example of Serbia’s territorial expansions during the Balkan Wars, it is possible to see a clear difference between the manner in which the state was understood by so-called nationalists and by libertarians. Nationalists relate the term “state” to the understanding of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century concept which relies on the concept of the “medieval” state and continues it while, on the other hand, the anti-nationalist/libertarian bloc sees the state as a social construct and territorial enlargement only as “expansionist pretexts” of former Ottoman territories, without the recognition of the “historical right” (Pitsos, 2018, p. 79).

For the development of Serbian-French cooperation through centuries and decades to be complete, the *Collection* also offers a text about Serbian society’s collective memory of important historical facts and examines Serbian society’s attitude about “eternal friendship” of Serbia and France. This “eternal friendship” was built on the alliance in the Great War, the memory of France’s role on the Thessaloniki front, the education of 5,000 Serbian students whose return to the fatherland was of great significance for the reorganization and prosperity of the country, as well as on the subsequent war alliance in the Second World War, when the former image became rather ideologically coloured (Kolaković, 2018, pp. 83–84). That image has not been so pronounced and stable since the 1990s, because of

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An issue of the Serbian Political Thought journal, dedicated to Serbia–France relations, published by the Institute for Political Studies, prepared on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Institute’s founding

Photo: Institute for Political Studies

the betrayed expectations of Serbian society in the European integrations process which were turned towards France and its help. The author concludes that the fraternal alliance and the thread of friendship built during the Great War still prevail in Serbian society, “although they underwent moments

of doubt during the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999” (Kolaković, 2018, p. 101). Within the publishing activities of the Institute for Political Studies, in 2016, Kolaković, PhD, also published a monograph *In the Service of the Fatherland: Cooperation of French and Serbian Intellectuals 1894–1914*, in which she comprehensively explained the beginnings of the creation of Serbian-French friendship and so-called cultural diplomacy (Kolaković, 2016). Moreover, this monograph corrects substantial gaps in Serbian history, political science and other related sciences, in which its special scientific contribution is reflected.

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The remaining papers in this publication from 2018 are characterized by the political and diplomatic aspects of modern bilateral relations in terms of European integrations. It is pointed out that the Western Balkans (and Serbia as the leader in the region) “played a crucial role in the development and promotion of the EU’s security policy, and that it constituted ‘an experimental area’ for further development of this policy, its attitude towards the NATO and the OUN, as well as the general direction of further development of this policy” (Vukasović, 2018, p. 128), as well as that the development of Euroscepticism in France as the EU axis country lies in historical reasons and inefficiency of institutions, while in Serbia as a membership candidate it lies on fatigue and disappointment due to “pre-accession conditions” (Lazić, 2018, p. 181).

A special collection *France and Serbia: Challenges of Eternal Friendship (La France et la Serbie: Les défis de l’amitié éternelle)* from 2021 was also dedicated to French-Serbian relations and it strengthened the already built scientific cooperation between institutions Sorbonne-Paris IV,

the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, the Embassy of the French Republic in Serbia, as well as of the French Institute in Belgrade with the Institute for Political Studies and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development. The Collection analyzes in the topics of the special edition from 2018 an even more detailed and comprehensive manner, adding new and previously unpublished hypotheses from the shared past. The specific feature of this publication is reflected in even greater interest of French and Serbian scientists, as well as the emphasis on current bilateral and regional relations, having in mind the fact that France adopted the new Strategy for the Western Balkans in 2019 (Kolaković & Markovic, 2021, p. 11).

Some of interesting topics in the *Collection* refer to the connection of Serbian-French diplomacy and industrialization in the period from 1871 to the beginning of the First World War. This paper emphasizes the expansion of the railway network in the territory of Serbia by 27.3% in the relevant period, which led to the opening of new mines, factories, the French bank, as well as new trends in communication – “the iron road” enabled the development of the telegraph and, subsequently, of telephone lines (Hassler, 2021, pp. 35–36). The Second World War brought new perspectives to French-Yugoslav military relations due to the opening of the Balkan front (Denda, 2021, p. 177), as well as the attitude of the Kingdom in exile towards “De Gaulle’s France”, which proceeded through extra-institutional diplomatic and para-diplomatic channels (Milikić, 2021, p. 197). The post-war period brought tense relations with France because of Yugoslav’s relations with the Soviet Union. At that time, cultural diplomacy

served to the communist regime in improving the image of Yugoslavia in France (Kolaković, 2021, pp. 229–230). The aspect of cultural diplomacy is also enriched in the interesting texts about Serbian cinematography (Naïma, 2021), as well as in the perception of Serbian painting in France (Mladenović, 2021).

The position of Serbia and the role of France within European integrations in this *Collection* are particularly emphasized by former ambassador, Mr. Lopandić, PhD, who concludes that it is in mutual interest that Serbia should become a member-state, i.e., that France finds it important to sit at the table together with the countries with which it has historical ties and good cooperation (Lopandić, 2021, p. 359), while Vukadinović, PhD, thinks that the European Union’s hesitation and additional complexity of the accession process consequently leads to a great influence of non-European countries, e.g., Russia, China and Turkey, on the region (Vukadinovic, 2021, p. 347).

In another special edition of the journal *Serbian Political Thought*, published in 2022, greater interest of France in the region of the Western Balkans may be observed at the time when it chaired the European Union. This edition is innovative in comparison to previous ones because of its emphasis on economic relations and France’s interests in reinforcing its presence in Serbia. The researchers of the Institute for Political Studies analyzed the tendencies in the development of relations between Serbia and France in different periods since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to date. They concluded that the “higher level of economic cooperation resulted in the improvement of political relations of the two countries and vice versa, and that the 1990s were

the period of the lowest level of economic and political relations in the history of Serbia and France” (Rapajić & Matijević, 2022, p. 164). The flow of foreign direct investments and the arrival of French companies were made possible by the opening of Serbian economy and liberalization of relations with the EU (*Ibid.*). On the other hand, Vukadinović, PhD, seems to continue the research from the 2021 *Collection*, since he believes that France’s strategy is to support the creation of the macro-region concept in the Western Balkans.<sup>[4]</sup> The author concludes that such tactics of interstate, regional economic networking within the region is favourable for France, as well as the entire EU, because in that manner they can displace other great powers from this territory (Vukadinović, 2022, p. 197).

The topic of the last published edition of *Serbian Political Thought* in 2023 was regional development of science and scientific cooperation among the Western Balkan countries. Although all the texts do not refer directly to France or French-Serbian relations, the contribution of this edition is in the previously never-published results reached by the researchers. The research results are the outcome of the program “Pavle Savić”, active since 2003 regarding scientific cooperation in the Danube region, and the program ES-Balk (Enseignement supérieur dans les Balkans occidentaux), in which the Institute for Political Studies participated. Regional cooperation in the sphere of economy, as

previously explained by Vukadinović, PhD, as well as I the sphere of culture and science, is of crucial significance to France, its increased influence and the Francophonie in the region. However, in contrast to French cultural diplomacy, in Serbia, the most important is “science for diplomacy” – the science as a channel of improving diplomatic relations, the situation in Albania is completely different.

In one of the papers in this edition of *Serbian Political Thought*, which analyzes France’s influenced on science and higher education in Albania, the conclusion reached is that “overall bilateral relations between these two countries can really be described as friendly, but the general observation is that French presence in Albania is disproportional to good bilateral relations” (Topalović, 2023, p. 100). It is with this topic, i.e., the development of scientific and cultural diplomacy, particularly after 2019 and the adoption of the aforementioned strategy for the Western Balkans, that Kolaković, PhD, opens this edition. This scientific paper recapitulates not only the history of scientific cooperation, but also modern aspects and tendencies of French scientific diplomacy in the territory of the Western Balkans. Although it is possible to observe the world trend in funding and investing in natural sciences,<sup>[5]</sup> it is encouraging to see applications for projects and funds in the sphere of social sciences and humanities, for which the smallest quantity of resources was previously allocated (Kolaković, 2023).

[4] Macroregions are formed for preparing and implementing joint projects of the countries which want to become full members of the EU (Serbia is a member of the Adriatic-Ionian and the Danube macroregions).

[5] In 2022, the Serbian-French Innovation Forum was founded with the aim of thematic exchange of knowledge and experience. At one of its first meetings, it placed an emphasis on the fields of industrial process digitalization, as well as on the question of the future of agriculture and nutrition (Institut Français, 2022).

## Implementation of joint projects and activities – the status and perspectives

Project engagement in the past few decades is one of the most important activities of scientific-research institutions in the world. The projects do not resolve only specific problems or fill the gaps in scientific research, but they are also extremely important in the development of bilateral and international cooperation. That Serbia is an attractive country for scientific cooperation and diplomacy is proved by the fact that between 2006 and 2020, as many as 353 project applications were received, 134 of which were selected for financing by France, while this number increases on an annual basis (Kolaković, 2023, p. 22).

One of the pioneering projects implemented by the Institute for Political Studies and its partners from France is “French-Serbian relations in the domain of diplomacy and media representation: Historical experience and contemporary challenges” (“Relations franco-serbes dans le domaine de la diplomatie et la représentation des médias: Expérience historique et défis contemporains”). From the beginning of 2018, within this project, Serbian and French academicians have conducted research in French and Serbian archives and libraries, organized a panel in Belgrade entitled “Ideas and changes: transfer of knowledge and images of the Other in French-Serbian relations” (“Idées et changements: transfert de connaissances et images

d’un autre dans les relations franco-serbes”), a round-table discussion in Paris entitled “(Un)explored topics of French-Serbian relations” (“Les thèmes (non) explorés des relations franco-serbes”) and a conference in 2019 (Kolaković & Markovic, 2021, p. 11). Thanks to this project, Serbian and French scientists had the opportunity to publish the aforementioned special edition of the journal *Serbian Political Thought* in 2018, to organize research and study visits, as well as a series of lectures about the history of Serbian-French relations in the Cultural Centre of Novi Sad.<sup>[6]</sup> The anniversary – 180 years from the establishment of French-Serbian diplomatic relations – was celebrated at the conference on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

We must not forget the other joint project which, apart from the Institute for Political Studies, also involves the partners: EUR’ORBEM and Sorbonne University, Paris. The project resulted from the aforementioned *Collection* from 2021 and the special edition of the journal *Serbian Political Thought* “France and the Western Balkans: the legacy of the past and the EU integration process”. Since in the relevant period the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, study tours, visits and workshops were cancelled.

The project “Reinforcement and perspectives of scientific cooperation in the Western Balkans” (“Reinforcement et perspectives de la coopération scientifique dans les Balkans Occidentaux”)<sup>[7]</sup> jointly implemented since 2021 by the National Institute

[6] The series of 6 lectures by Kolaković, PhD, in the Cultural Centre of Novi Sad is available at: [https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=aleksandra+kolakovi%C4%87+kcn](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=aleksandra+kolakovi%C4%87+kcn)s

[7] The project financed by the program ES-Balk (Enseignement supérieur dans les Balkans occidentaux) was entrusted by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (Ministère de l’Europe et des affaires étrangères [MEAE]) to the management of the company France Education International. See: <https://edbalk.eu/le-projet/>.



of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (L'Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales [IN-ALCO]) in Paris, the Institute for Political Studies in Belgrade, the Faculty of Philology in Nikšić and the Faculty of Law in Bitola, one of the most important in cooperation to date. Apart from the fact that it is directed towards strengthening and intensifying French-Serbian scientific-research relations and forming a regional doctoral school, it is of extreme importance to emphasize that its goal is to help and facilitate accession to the European Union, i.e., to meet the standards in these spheres. Thanks to mutual activities, many workshop were held at which the participants, as well as the employees of the institutions as project partners, had the opportunity to learn the basics of project writing and to position common interests in science within the European integrations process.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March 2022, in the premises of the Institute for Political Studies, a workshop was held under the name "Scientific and university cooperation of Serbia and the Western Balkans, and the experience of doctoral schools" ("La coopération scientifique et universitaire entre la France et les Balkans occidentaux et l'expérience des écoles doctorales"). In the workshop, good and bad experiences of the participating countries were pointed out in the implementation of doctoral academic studies, as well as the prospects of young doctoral students for further specialization (ESbalk, 2022a). In the middle of September 2022, a workshop was held at the Faculty of Law "Saint Clement of Ohrid" in Bitola, entitled "For connected higher education" („Pour un enseignement supérieur connecté") (Edbalk, 2022b). It was the first joint framework for the work of all the partners, where it was possible to point clearly

to different perspectives of the countries regarding scientific cooperation with France, but also to the status and position of science and researchers in Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Afterwards, on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> October, in the premises of the Institute for Political Studies, a workshop was held under the title "Position of scientific research in the European integrations process. Project identification, preparation and implementation" ("La place de la recherche scientifique dans le processus d'intégration européenne: identification, rédaction et réalisation des projets"). This activity was determined as extremely important due to the transfer of the knowledge of Serbian and French experts about writing European research projects for the program "Horizon Europe", which opened the space for joint applications (Edbalk, 2022c). Applying for and potential approval of the implementation of these projects has immeasurable significance not only for institutions, but also for researchers' individual progress and development. Good project writing and management techniques are necessary given the fact that in the sphere of social sciences and humanities it is extremely difficult to get large grants. The reason lies in their lack of popularity, particularly referring to social sciences, because of their inability to offer quick and practical solutions to certain problems and needs of society as required by the modern world. Technical orientation towards shared applications for project funding is the foundation of the bright future of Serbian-French scientific relations.

Moreover, we should also point out the joint conference held in Paris in November of the same year, when the representatives of the Institute for Political Studies, led by Aleksandra Kolaković,

PhD, had the opportunity to discuss and assess the success of previous activities with their project partners, as well as to draw attention to potential future challenges of scientific-research cooperation (Edbalk, 2022d). A special place was given to the topics about the role and position of young people in higher education and science, including the organization of a doctoral school for students and researchers of the Western Balkan countries. Within this project, two webinars were held with the aim of emphasizing the importance of young experts – doctoral students and those with a doctoral degree – in building common future and progress of individual countries.

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## Conclusion

In the course of more than 180 years of history of French-Serbian diplomatic relations, there have been many rises and falls – from firm “eternal friendship” during and after the Great War, via disappointment of the Serbian people due to the bombing of Serbia in 1999, to renewed close cooperation and reliance on France within European integrations, which were tests for Serbian-French relations. In these hot-cold relations of the two countries, what is exceptional is successful scientific and educational cooperation and the strengthening of cultural and scientific diplomacy at the beginning of the new millennium. The French government allocates substantial funds and regularly issues advertisements for the mobility of students

and researchers from Serbia who, apart from their temporary stay in France, can also improve their skills and transfer gained knowledge into their country, thus creating substantial social capital (Topalović, 2023, p. 99) and forming an important part of Serbian intelligentsia. A great role in the scientific cooperation with French institutions in social sciences and humanities in the past several years has been played by the Institute for Political Studies. Thanks to the implementation of numerous projects with French partners, science has become one of important diplomatic channels. By connecting researchers, the Institute has managed to publish one joint collection and three special editions of the journal *Serbian Political Thought* and, as a publisher, it has also opened the doors to many other texts with the Francophone topics. In addition, it has organized a large number of conferences, scientific gatherings, study and research visits and workshops. Moreover, along with bilateral activities with Serbian institutions, by adopting the new Strategy for the Western Balkans in 2019, France managed to connect the entire region in scientific terms. Through cultural/scientific diplomacy, France maintains its influence in these territories, facilitates researchers’ networking and helps in the process of overcoming the burden of the war past and specific differences in the region. That is why it can be concluded that cultural and scientific diplomacy are already proven methods for establishing good bilateral, as well as regional relations, and that good foundations have been laid for further and even broader cooperation.

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