



## REPORT #1

# French Media Coverage of Armenia and Armenians: An Overview

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This report provides an introductory analysis of how the French media portrays Armenia and Armenians. It aims to outline the unique aspects of France's relationship with Armenia, particularly through the lens of the significant Armenian diaspora in France. Furthermore, it seeks to elucidate how these unique aspects shape the French media's coverage of Armenian issues. The report also intends to examine and assess the distinctive features of the French audiovisual landscape and their implications for the treatment of the Armenian question, including differences in perspectives, political and ideological stances, and economic considerations. Ultimately, this report seeks to lay the groundwork for further investigation, highlighting areas for future exploration and analysis.

### **Why get interested in the French media's perspective on Armenia?**

The media functions as a crucial intermediary between global events and French society, shaping public opinion and activating various political, economic, cultural, and diplomatic channels. This role is particularly significant in the context of Armenia, where the country's tragic history and ongoing challenges have limited direct implications for the French economy. However, the economic allure of Azerbaijan, particularly in terms of increased oil imports to France since the onset of the conflict in Ukraine<sup>1</sup>, has the potential to strain France's traditional alliance with Armenia. Consequently, it is imperative for Armenian organizations to strategically engage with the French media landscape to foster deeper political, cultural, diplomatic, and economic relations between France and Armenia. Moreover, such engagement provides the Network State with unique access to the Armenian diaspora in France, enhancing its influence and outreach capabilities.

To effectively invest in the French media, a comprehensive understanding of their operational mechanisms and their perceptions of Armenia is essential to devise appropriate strategies. Beyond merely seeking visibility, a nuanced understanding of media dynamics related to Armenia in France enables a deeper comprehension of how Armenia and Armenians are portrayed, considering diverse ideological frameworks and competing interests. The objective of these reports is to elucidate the complexities surrounding the French media's perception of Armenia and Armenians.

### **The specificities of France regarding Armenia:**

France's unique relationship with Armenia is characterized by several distinctive factors.



Firstly, France is home to the largest Armenian diaspora in Europe, with over 600,000 Armenians residing in the country, including 400,000 who were born there.<sup>2</sup> This diaspora is primarily concentrated in Paris, Lyon (particularly in Décines-Charpieu, a commune historically populated by Armenians), and Marseille. The origins of this diaspora can be traced back to the escape from the Armenian genocide of 1915 and the subsequent arrival of refugees in France. However, ties between France and Armenia date back much further, to the 11th century.

The Armenian diaspora in France has undergone various periods and developments. Initially marginalized and isolated, the diaspora faced significant challenges during the economic crisis of 1929. However, during World War II, Armenians in France distinguished themselves in the French resistance, with notable figures such as Missak Manouchian, a communist resistance fighter who was executed by Nazi Germany in 1943 and later honored in the Pantheon in 2024. This period of valor brought a newfound prestige to the Armenian community, leading to greater integration and an increase in French nationality acquisitions and mixed marriages. The 1980s marked a further integration of the Armenian community into French political and cultural life, particularly with the rise of the Socialist Party. Armenians gained representation in local government, and numerous Armenian cultural centers were established in areas with a significant Armenian population, such as Décines. Additionally, the 1988 earthquake in Armenia prompted a wave of solidarity from the Armenian diaspora in France.<sup>3</sup>

Most Armenians, especially those who have been settled in France for several generations, do not consider Armenian as their dominant language.<sup>4</sup>

Cultural connections between Armenia and France remain robust. The Armenian diaspora in France includes many renowned artists in France, Armenia, and internationally. The most illustrious is, of course, Charles Aznavour, but we can also mention the singer Rosy Armen, the filmmaker Michel Legrand, the director Henri Verneuil, the filmmaker and actor Charles Gérard... These artists have played a significant role in promoting Armenian culture in France. Aznavour has thus mentioned Armenia in many songs: *Tendre Arménie*, *Autobiographie*, *Ils sont tombés...* and is the originator of the charity song *Pour toi Arménie*. Armenia is also a member of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIT) since 2008.

France officially recognized the Armenian genocide of 1915 in 2001, and in 2012, the French Parliament passed a law criminalizing the denial of the genocide. However, this law was later overturned by the Constitutional Council amid debates about the validity of memorial laws.<sup>5</sup>

It is noteworthy that France is home to a substantial Turkish diaspora, numbering approximately 700,000 individuals. It is important to recognize that not all members of this diaspora support the Erdogan regime, as it encompasses a diverse range of ethnic and religious groups, including Kurds, Alevis, and even Armenians. However, a segment of this diaspora does express support for the AKP (Justice and Development Party) and espouses nationalist and Pan-Turkist ideologies. This subset often harbors animosity towards Armenians, which has occasionally resulted in clashes between Turkish and

Armenian communities, as witnessed in Décines (Lyon) on October 28, 2020, following the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In addition, there is significant lobbying by Azerbaijan in France aimed at influencing the traditionally pro-Armenian stance of the French government. This lobbying effort involves three French organizations: the Centre Culturel d'Azerbaïdjan, the France/Azerbaïdjan Forum, and the Association des Amis de l'Azerbaïdjan. These organizations disseminate pro-Azerbaijan narratives in the media, emphasizing Azerbaijan's "secular" and "multiethnic" character and promoting the idea of Baku's "peaceful intentions" in contrast to what is perceived as the bellicosity and intolerance of Armenia. Furthermore, they highlight the plight of Azerbaijanis who fled Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1990s.<sup>6</sup>

### **Navigating the French Media Landscape: Insights into the Audiovisual Representation of Armenia**

The French media landscape exhibits a considerable degree of plurality in terms of both the diversity of channels of expression and editorial perspectives, although this diversity is currently facing scrutiny. According to the 2023 press freedom ranking, France occupies the 23rd position globally. The media landscape in France is characterized by a variety of types and scales of media outlets, including national print media such as Le Monde, Le Figaro, and Libération, regional print media like Ouest France, Le Parisien, and La Marseillaise, television channels such as BFMTV and Franceinfo, and independent press publications like Médiapart and Le Monde Diplomatique.

There is also a wide variety of opinions and editorial lines represented in the French media landscape. This includes outlets from the radical left (e.g., Blast, Le Média...), left-leaning publications (e.g., Libération), right-wing newspapers (e.g., Le Figaro), and even far-right media (e.g., Cnews, Valeurs actuelles...). Some outlets claim greater neutrality, such as Le Monde. A major criticism of the French media is its concentration in the hands of billionaires. Notable examples include the Bolloré group, which owns Cnews, and the Drahi group, which owns BFMTV. The media map published by Le Monde Diplomatique<sup>7</sup> remains a definitive reference for understanding this concentration. This concentration poses a threat to media plurality, as some owners are accused of using their media solely as a platform for their own ideologies. For instance, the television channel Cnews is currently under investigation for the lack of pluralism in its programming, with almost all of its contributors being associated with the far-right.

In 2023, 76% of French people expressed an interest in current affairs, marking a significant increase from previous years (62% in 2022). Television and the internet are the most popular media sources for news consumption. However, it is important to consider this in conjunction with the level of trust placed in different media formats: Radio and print media are more trusted than television and the internet.

Despite the high viewership of television (an average of 3 hours and 19 minutes per day), there is no indication that it is followed closely for news, often serving more as

background noise or entertainment rather than a primary source of information. Therefore, it is essential not to rely solely on audience measurements to gauge the importance of various media outlets.<sup>8</sup>

Despite a resurgence of interest, France is currently grappling with a crisis of confidence in the media. Surveys underscore the prevalence of "information fatigue," which stems from various factors. Forty-eight percent of respondents feel that the media consistently covers the same topics, 38% experience feelings of anxiety and helplessness, and 27% express a lack of trust in the media.<sup>9</sup> These challenges present both opportunities and obstacles that must be understood to comprehend how different French media outlets frame the perception of Armenia and Armenians. This understanding is crucial for potentially defining a strategy to engage with these media outlets.

For instance, it is essential to recognize the distinct characteristics of media outlets at different levels: national, regional, and independent. National media outlets may not reach the same audience as regional ones. Regional media, while more limited in reach, may offer the opportunity to connect with an audience that has more trust and may be more receptive to a positive framing of Armenia and its culture. Independent press, although reaching a smaller audience, often represents a dedicated segment of the population that can serve as a significant advocate for the Armenian cause.

It is crucial to comprehend how editorial stances influence the framing of perceptions regarding Armenia. For instance, certain media outlets, like Le Monde, shape their perception of Armenia based on human rights issues and their violation in Nagorno-Karabakh. On the other hand, media outlets with Christian affiliations, such as La Croix, may frame their perception of Armenia in a religious context. Conversely, some right-wing or far-right media outlets, such as Le Figaro or Valeurs actuelles, adopt a "civilizational" angle, portraying Armenia as the defender of Christian civilization in the East against Islamic civilization.

However, this perspective often leads to misunderstandings and misconceptions about the nature of the conflict and Armenian issues. For example, there is often a misunderstanding of Iran's role in the conflict. This framework can be particularly perilous, as it may lend credibility to the communication tools disseminated by Azerbaijani propaganda offices. These tools often depict Armenia as ethnically and religiously intolerant, contrasting it with the alleged tolerance and secularism of Azerbaijan.

While embracing the civilizational framework may initially appear to be a logical approach to easily persuade a segment of the French population, it could also alienate another segment that might otherwise be convinced.

We can also highlight a framework prevalent in left-wing media outlets that emphasizes the communist and resistance legacy of the Armenian diaspora, particularly focusing on figures like Missak Manouchian. The recent enshrinement of Manouchian in the Pantheon on February 21, 2024, has reignited interest in this

narrative. Therefore, it would be wise not to limit our focus to frameworks that may appear more obvious, particularly those within the "civilizational" framework. Specifically, it is advisable to avoid the overly simplistic and caricatured versions of this framework, as exemplified by the far-right newspaper Valeurs actuelles. This publication often reflects more of a French Islamophobic political agenda than a genuine concern for Armenia.

Other frameworks are emerging that present unique opportunities to elevate Armenia's presence in the French discourse. For instance, certain left-leaning media outlets have shown a recent willingness to not cede the defense of the Armenian cause solely to the right and far-right. This shift is evident in the recent coverage by the radical left media outlet Blast on the situation in Syunik. Engaging with these emerging frameworks could be highly beneficial for Armenia, as it allows the country to appeal to an engaged audience that is often overlooked in discussions about the Armenian cause.

It is crucial to raise awareness among the French public about the immediate existential threat Armenia faced in the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. However, focusing solely on this aspect may lead to information fatigue and feelings of anxiety, potentially resulting in a loss of interest in the Armenian cause. Therefore, it is necessary to also highlight and invest in other aspects of Armenia, such as the dissemination of its rich cultural heritage and history. This approach ensures a more comprehensive and balanced representation of Armenia, engaging audiences beyond the immediate crisis.

Lastly, it is important to note the presence of numerous media outlets in France that cater to the Armenian diaspora, some of which broadcast in the Armenian language. These include Nor Haratch, the successor of the Haratch newspaper, which was the first Armenian-language daily newspaper in Europe, Le Courier d'Erevan, Nouvelles d'Arménie, Radio-Arménie, Radio A., France-Arménie, among others. These media platforms serve as effective means of communication with the Armenian diaspora in France. However, it is advisable not to exclusively target these outlets but also to engage with a non-Armenian audience to broaden the reach and impact of communication efforts.

### **Avenues of reflection:**

Reflections on future research could include an examination of how Armenia and Armenians are portrayed in the French media through various lenses and levels of analysis. Understanding these perspectives and the differing scales of coverage will enable the Network State to gain a deeper understanding of how Armenian issues are perceived in the diverse landscape of the French media. Special attention should be given to less overt or overlooked perspectives and scales, as these, despite being in the minority, can serve as significant platforms for promoting the Armenian cause.



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*The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Network State.*

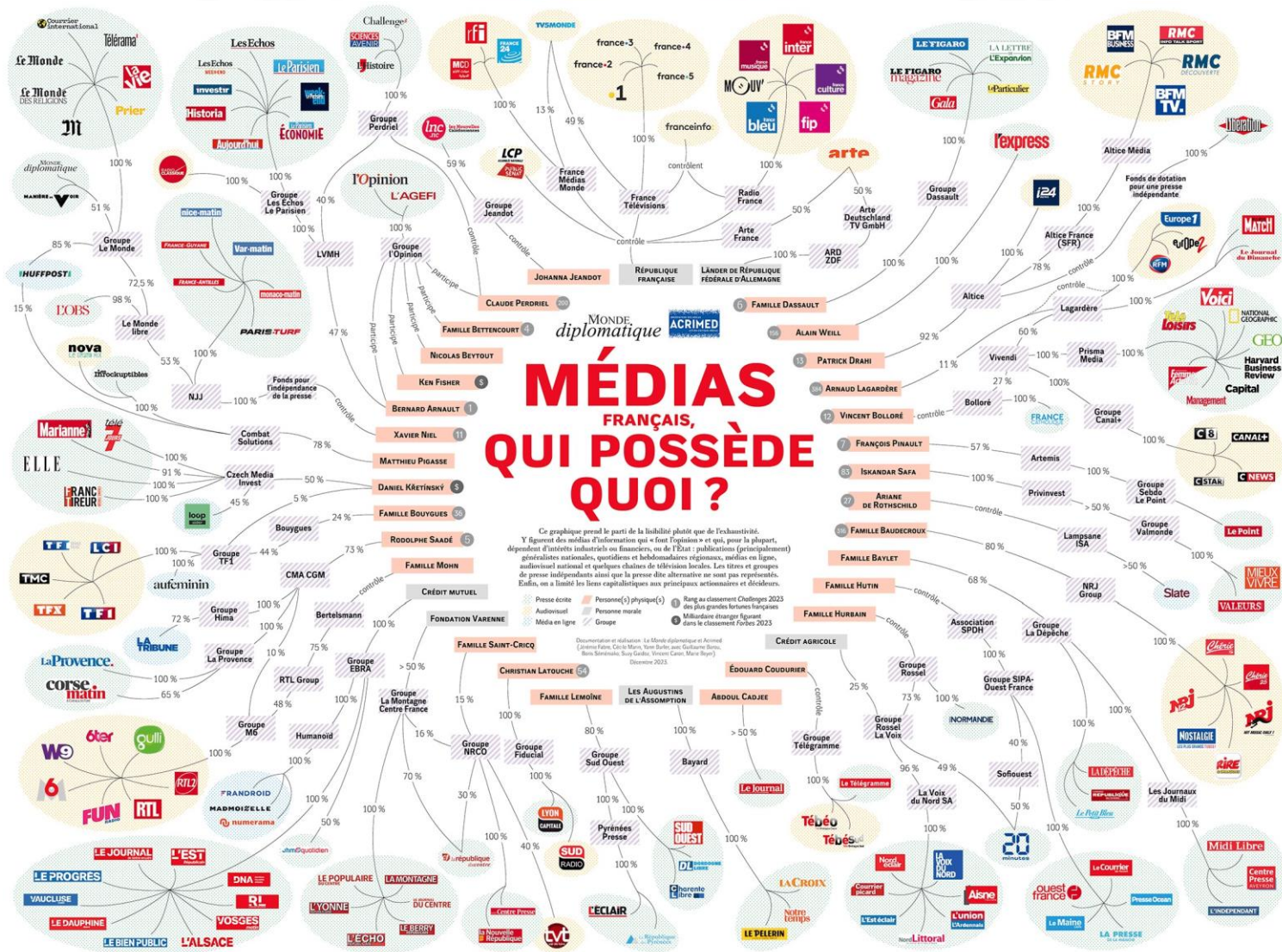
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ANNEX:

- « Médias français, qui possède quoi ? », Le Monde Diplomatique and Acrimed, 2023.

ANNEX:



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