

# **Institutional Governance of the Francophonie after 50 Years of Existence, between Geopolitical Interest and the Challenges of Economic Development/Strategy**

**Aurelia GROSU<sup>1</sup>**

## ***Abstract***

*Economy is a priority for the International Organization of Francophonie (OIF), whose objective is to build, together with its member states and governments, associate members and observers, a new model of economic growth in the Francophone space adjusted to the current context of globalization. The actions currently carried out by OIF in the economic sector are based on the priorities of the Economic Strategy adopted by the heads of Francophone states and governments at the Summit of the Francophonie held in Dakar in 2014, even though the organization is built around the affiliation to the French language and the promotion of the diversity of Francophone cultures.*

*By adopting an economic strategy, the Francophone states and governments committed to defend the joint interests of the Francophone space and impose a common reform vision, particularly in the field of trade, access to financing sources and for a more efficient valorisation of innovation and creativity in the service of sustainable development. From this perspective, OIF supports entrepreneurship as a priority, an effort considered essential for a truly inclusive and long-lasting growth, giving particular attention to economic initiatives carried out by young people and women, as part of the gender equality and youth policy. The main objective is to support and strengthen the business environment from an institutional, financial and regulatory perspective. Moreover, the organization has the capacity to gather together expert networks, to facilitate the exchange of expertise, best practices and prediction analyses in the entrepreneurial field, being a truly supportive relay of contacts between professional networks.*

*By its uniqueness and specificity in the current multilateral landscape, OIF is characterized by its capacity to act simultaneously on three essential levels: 1. states and governments; 2. national institutions and civil society; 3. non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The added value of OIF is to take on the role of a facilitator in relation to the national Francophone administrations, acting for the identification and implementation of innovative economic models that generate an inclusive sustainable development.*

*On the background of an international reflection, started at the end of last year, in the context of its 50-year anniversary, regarding OIF directions and governance, this paper reveals the main challenges and trends of economic development in the Francophone countries, in a period marked by the disturbance of geopolitical balances, the exacerbation of certain outbreaks of security and economic crises.*

*As part of this effort of evaluation of the institutional governance of the Francophonie and OIF's place on the current multilateralism scene, answers are sought to a series of questions, that concern the academic and research environment, as well as the national administrations that invest politically and financially in the Francophonie*

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*cause: Do the current priorities of the Institutional Francophonie and the current structure of the organization meet the economic development needs and expectations of the Francophone populations that they represent? What would be the added value of the Francophonie in terms of sustainable development, the strengthening of the Francophone economic space, the support for education and Francophone culture or in the field of settling international conflicts? What would be the priority intervention axes?*

**Keywords:** *Francophonie, Francophone Economic Space, Economic Strategy, Multilateralism, Institutional Governance, International Organization of Francophonie, Institutional Francophonie*

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## **1. Introduction**

The international Francophone movement, framed in its institutional form in the International Organization of Francophonie, is celebrating 50 years of existence this year. The Secretary General of the Francophonie, Louise Mushikiwabo, who took office in January 2019, committed to modernize the management and governance of the institutional Francophonie in a time marked by the disturbance of geopolitical balances, the exacerbation of certain outbreaks of security, social and economic crises, the unprecedented development of information technologies, the domination of economic interests on the part of major powers, particularly those influential in the African space and the tendency towards unilateralism.

In this context, at the level of the 88 member states and governments, associate members and observers of OIF, which have in common not only the French language, but also adherence to shared values (sustainability, solidarity, cultural diversity, right to education, gender equality, democracy and human rights), a reflection process was started at the end of last year regarding the role, directions, management and governance of the Francophonie. As part of this exercise of rethinking the institutional Francophonie, the need to change the mode of operation and management, the organizational culture and the priority areas for action in the following period is given consideration. The need to refocus the actions in support of reforms for the economic and social development of the Francophone countries, particularly those less developed, is one of the concerns taken into account. OIF has the ambition to consolidate its role as a facilitator of cooperation and driver of growth in Francophone countries (Chen, 2013).

With this in mind, in the context of the global health crisis that had a serious impact on all the economies of the world and, in particular, the poor ones, the Secretary General of the Francophonie publicly supported the need to defer the payment of the debts of African countries and, on April 15th, 2010, following this initiative, the G20 members approved the deferral of debt payments for 76 African countries. This is just one example of leadership that OIF has the ambition to

commit to in the Francophone space in order to support the sustainable development of these societies.

From its establishment, the Institutional Francophonie has sustainable development at its core, with focus on: the fight against inequalities within and among the member states, inclusive prosperity and inter and intra generational equity, planet preservation, peace and democratic governance, as well as cooperation and solidarity between nations. From this perspective, OIF is at the heart of international commitments and supports many innovations for sustainable development in the Francophone space. These fields proved crucial even 45 years later when they were defined as UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Jean-Claude de l'Estrac, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mauritius and Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission, defined the Francophonie in 2018 as "a common will to fight against the inequities of the globalized economy through intercontinental and multicultural solidarity, consolidated on sharing a French language that carries universal values at the crossroads of many traditions and political visions. This linguistic community is also a political community. Hence, it is a project for the future and a ray of hope".

It is important to note that, from a historical perspective, the Francophonie is a space of privileged economic and commercial relations. According to the report "Poids économique de la Francophonie: Impact via l'ouverture commerciale", regarding the economic Francophonie, drafted in December 2012 by researchers Celine Carere and Maria Massood, the Francophone space represents: 5.5% of the world's oil resources, 6.5% of the global population, 8.4% of the GDP, 11% of the agricultural land, 14% of the direct foreign investments<sup>2</sup>.

A reflection at international level is ongoing within a group of experts specifically dedicated to the organization's directions and governance, and its results are to be presented, together with a series of concrete proposals to reform OIF's activity, by the Secretary General of the Francophonie during the next Summit of the Francophonie, which is traditionally attended by heads of members states and governments, associate members and observers of OIF. This was set to be held in Tunis in December this year, but was postponed because of the current health crisis to a date which is to be subsequently announced. As a matter of fact, the choice of the host country for this anniversary Summit is not coincidental, being the country of origin of one of the four founders of the Francophonie, respectively Habib Bourguiba (1903-2000), the first Tunisian president and the main actor in obtaining the independence of the Republic of Tunisia.

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<sup>2</sup> Céline Carrère and Maria Masood, "Economic weight of the Francophonie: Impact via commercial opening" („Poids économique de la Francophonie: Impact via l'ouverture commerciale"), Foundation for Studies and Research on International Development (FERDI) and University of Geneva, December 2012

## 2. Research Objective, Method and Objects

### Research Objective

The main goal of the research is to assess the place that the Francophone economic strategy has within OIF's cooperation missions, illustrating through the analysis and diagnostics approach (SWOT analysis) the advantages and challenges of its implementation, as well as the prospects of adjusting to the current developments.

### Research Methodology

The research was conducted based on the analysis and diagnostics approach (SWOT analysis -Strengths - Weaknesses - Opportunities - Threats), starting from the assessment of the current situation of the structure, functionality and implementation of OIF's economic strategy, while also achieving an analytical projection on its prospects, taking into account the factors that may occur, the potential difficulties and the vulnerabilities. Based on the statistical indicators provided by the Observatory of the French Language<sup>3</sup>, a structure of independent experts within OIF, as well as the direct observation within the organization, and the numerous direct contacts with program specialists and analysts within Francophone structures, this paper is intended to be an analytical evaluation on the background of the international reflection started by OIF in order to rethink the institutional governance of the Francophonie (Gazzola, Grin, 2008).

### **Strengths: Institutional Francophonie, between the cultural-educational project and the economic and political mission**

The activity of the International Organization of Francophonie is focused on the principle of cooperation that is to say of solidarity between members. The

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<sup>3</sup> The Observatory of the French Language is a unique structure within OIF, that aims at gathering and analyzing the information regarding the numerous evolutions at international level related to the French language, in terms of its use, as well as the main missions of the organization: promotion of the French language, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity; promotion of education, higher education and research; promotion of innovation and creativity in the service of the economy in terms of sustainable development; promotion of peace, democracy and human rights (consolidation of democratic values, observance of human rights, conflict management and peacebuilding). The Observatory consists of 11 renowned personalities in the scientific and academic field throughout the Francophone space in multiple areas (economy, sociology, linguistics, statistics etc.), that enable the development of thorough strategic analyses. To collect the data, the contribution of OIF member states and governments is required. An inclusive report entitled "The French Language in the World" is published every four years, on the margins of the Summit of the Francophonie, that gathers together heads of members states and governments and observers of OIF.

Institutional Francophonie has equally aspirations that are fundamentally related to the promotion of the French language, and economic and political ambitions: promotion of democracy, of the rule of law, maintaining electoral processes, observance of rights and freedoms, equal opportunities, women's empowerment, etc. Francophone multilateral cooperation, which is at the heart of OIF action, is part of the missions and objectives of the second strategic framework of the organization (2015-2022). This framework was developed at the Summit held in Dakar in 2014 and sets out the guiding principles of Francophone cooperation.

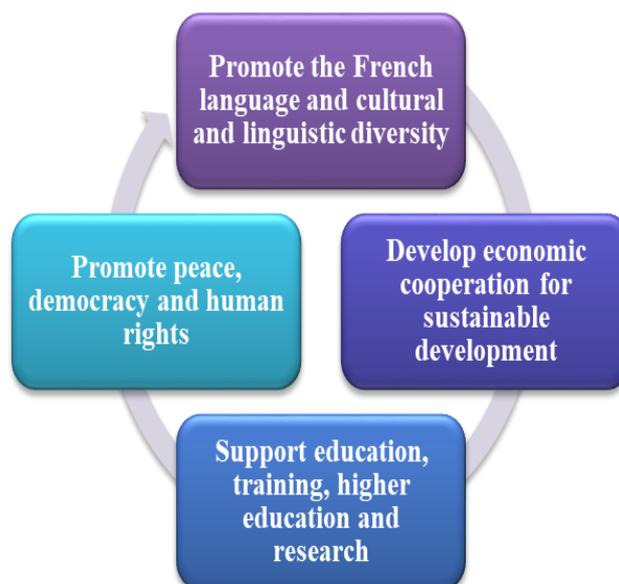
However, let's not forget that the Francophonie is a highly heterogeneous space in terms of the economic development of the member states. We find some of the richest countries (two G8 members: Canada and France), as well as the least developed countries (23 of which are African). From this perspective, the principle of solidarity and cooperation in the Francophone space is fundamental for an action aimed at reducing development gaps between the member states and supporting the countries in difficulty. As a matter of fact, in the preamble of the Strategic Framework (2014-2022) it is set out: "Through its commitment in favour of multilateral cooperation and respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Francophonie will continue to assert, during the next eight years, the presence and originality of its undertaking, by implementing the action programs, while also taking part in the interventions of the international community and contributing to the new post-2015 Development Program, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>4</sup>.

The Francophone cooperation actions are financed through a unique tool, the unique Multilateral Fund (UMF), where the states make their statutory (mandatory) or voluntary financial contribution.

The Francophone multilateral cooperation strategic framework defines the 4 main missions of the Francophonie, with no ranking existing between them, each being equally important. All actions specific to the 4 missions are coordinated and implemented by OIF, together with its operators and the member states. Among the intervention methods, we mention the following: expertise and advisory service, consultation, knowledge sharing, advocacy, information, awareness, facilitation and fundraising and projects funding (Diouf, 2014).

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<sup>4</sup> Strategic framework of the Francophonie 2015-2022, XVth Conference of Heads of State and Government of countries with French in common Dakar (Senegal), November 29 and 30, 2014 (Cadre stratégique de la Francophonie 2015-2022, XV<sup>e</sup> Conférence des chefs d'État et de gouvernement des pays ayant le français en partage Dakar (Sénégal), les 29 et 30 novembre 2014) [https://www.francophonie.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/sommet\\_xv\\_csf\\_2015\\_2022\\_0.pdf](https://www.francophonie.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/sommet_xv_csf_2015_2022_0.pdf)



Promotion of the French language, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity is the first mission of the Francophone Strategic Framework. The objectives consist first of all of strengthening the use and promotion of the French language, as well as preserving and enhancing linguistic diversity (Hagège, 2006).

The French language is undoubtedly the very foundation of the efforts carried out by OIF, that currently gathers together 88 member states and governments (54 Full Members, 7 Associates and 27 Observers), from all geographic areas, from Africa to Asia or the Middle East.

But let's not forget that the French language maintains its leading position in multilateralism, being the official language of 32 states and governments, the official or working language in the main international organizations, the 4th language in the digital environment and the second language in the business environment. The fifth most widely spoken language in the world, French is spoken by 300 million people worldwide, according to the latest Observatory of the French Language drafted by OIF in 2018 (of whom around 36% in Europe and more than 54% in Africa). Learning the French language and using it for social integration and professional development is, thus, an important tool in implementing the organization's priorities, in both the cultural and development sector (Wolton, 2006).

Promotion actions are carried out first of all in the member countries where French is not an official language and is not used on a daily basis. For instance, OIF signs linguistic agreements with the member states which express their interest in taking measures to consolidating the teaching and use of the French language in their countries. Even though in certain countries, French has the status of official language or language of instruction in schools, OIF can get involved by carrying

out French teaching programs, particularly through the use of media and information technology (Deniau, 2001 et 2004).

French is the official or working language in the main international or regional organizations, which is the reason why OIF makes efforts to promote it at multilateral level as well. On the background of the increased tendency towards monolingualism in international organizations, OIF, which has the promotion of the French language and cultural and linguistic diversity at the heart of its mission, is actively involved in it being better positioned in multilateralism (Léger, 1987).

This is the reason why, in 2006, on the occasion of the Summit held in Bucharest, OIF adopted a Vade-mecum regarding the use of the French language in international organizations. By signing this document, the member states and governments committed to oversee the observance of the use of French as working language or official language in international organizations and intervene when slippages are found. In order to observe the status of the French language in international organizations, and ensure an active participation in their activity, OIF has four Permanent Representations (RP) accredited to international and regional organizations (to the African Union, the European Union, the United Nations in Geneva and New York). These are complemented by the Groups of Francophone ambassadors, who are attached to the international organizations and form essential relays for OIF action in favour of mobilization for the French language and for multilingualism.

For the Francophonie, the efforts in favour of the French language are achieved in conjunction with the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as the promotion of the economic and political interests of the Francophone space. Furthermore, the objective is to secure the culture in the development strategies and increase the engagement of young people and women in the artistic, cultural and digital creation. In this respect, OIF's engagement and effort in raising the awareness of the member states in view of adopting and ratifying UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions adopted on 20 October 2005 is quite significant. Furthermore, the Francophonie is involved in actions to support cultural production and international cultural events. For instance, in Africa, it supports many large-scale events, such as: Fespaco, the Pan African Film and Television Festival in Ouagadougou. In addition, the Francophonie also established MASA, a market for African performing arts, that supports cultural production on the African Continent.

Promotion of education, higher education and research is also an important mission of the strategic framework of OIF's action in the member states, associate members and observers. This dimension is based on favouring the policies focused on the needs and requirements of the labour markets and on the demands of the citizens, in particular women and young people, considered as categories requiring more action in the Francophone space. It can be easily established that education is a major component of the Francophonie, even based on the fact that 2 out of 4 operators of the Institutional Francophonie are closely related to education and training: the Francophone University Agency and Senghor of Alexandria

University. OIF's mission in this field is to support the states in managing the educational and teacher training systems. A notable example is IFADEM Program – the Francophone initiative for open-distance teacher training that aims at improving the skills of educators and teachers, in terms of teaching and learning. This initiative was established following the Francophone Summit in Bucharest in 2006, being managed by OIF, in collaboration with the Universities Agency of the Francophonie (AUF), the French Development Agency (AFD), the Canadian International Development Agency, the Ministry of International Relations from Quebec and the European Union. Another Francophone cooperation action that is worth mentioning is the ELAN Program – School and National Languages in Africa that is part of the actions to promote and progressively introduce bilingual education in primary schools, articulating the African languages and the French language. This international partnership established in 2011 with the technical and financial support of OIF, AUF, AFD and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was implemented with the will of the Ministries of National Education from 8 African countries: Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, RD Congo and Senegal. In addition to the objective of optimizing and strengthening capacities in the Francophone space in favour of bilingual education in African countries, this program also aims at supporting the Ministries of National Education in achieving the necessary reforms in the field of primary education adjusted to the current needs. The positive results obtained following the deployment of this program in the period 2013-2015, which proved, according to the organization's evaluations, the added value of bilingual education, led to the decision to expand the program in 4 other countries in the region: Ivory Coast, Guinea, Madagascar and Togo.

Moreover, the Francophonie favors education, training and research oriented towards long-term development and job creation. For instance, in particular with the help of the University Agency the Francophonie <sup>5</sup>, a global structure that gathers together 990 universities from 118 countries on the 5 continents, the Francophonie stimulates the creation of networks of higher education institutions and exchanges between researchers in the North and in the South. OIF also favors the emergence of research poles with regional vocation, and supports mobility projects within the Francophone space for young researchers (Carrère, Masood, 2012/2014).

In short, this dimension is particularly aimed at favoring policies focused on the demands of the labor market and the requests for citizen participation from young people and women; supporting the member states, associate members and observers in the proper management of their educational and teacher training systems; stimulating the creation of networks of higher education institutions and exchanges between researchers in the North and in the South, promoting the emergence of research poles with regional vocation, supporting young researchers in the Francophone space.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.auf.org/a-propos/qui-nous-sommes/>

Another important mission of the Francophonie is the political one, respectively promotion of peace, democracy and human rights, with focus on: consolidation of democratic values, observance of human rights, conflict management and peacebuilding. OIF's action in this field is carried out in compliance with the Charter from Antananarivo, the Declaration from Bamako (2000) and the one from Saint-Boniface (2006). Involvement in supporting peace missions in conflict areas, oversight of electoral processes, support for strengthening democratic structures, promotion of solidarity and cooperation in the discourse at international level are activities that the Institutional Francophonie carries out in close cooperation with the member states and governments and the observers.

And lastly, the mission that we will focus on targets innovation and creativity in the service of economy in terms of sustainable development. The Francophonie supports the Francophone states in drawing up the national sustainability strategy, focusing on the integration of the cultural component of sustainability, on energy transition, the fight against climate change, the innovative ways of production and sustainable consumption, as well as creation of jobs for women and young people (Valentin, 1970-2010). For instance, in the offing of the Summit in Terre de Rio, organized by the UN in 2012, the Francophonie organized preparatory meetings with the Francophone states in order to support a common position with regard to environmental matters. Moreover, the Institute of the Francophonie for Sustainable Development (IFEFD) is another important instrument in supporting the Francophone states and governments that the Francophonie makes available to them.

The Francophone economic space or the economic Francophonie, are according to the Observatory of the French Language<sup>6</sup> (Galimard, 2018) two concepts with quite fluctuating supporting definitions and figures. Even though it is often used to define the belonging to the French language in relation to the economic effects produced by this identity, the Francophone economic space is not a formalized concept, as the European Economic Area is (Barrat, Moisei, 2004).

The institutionalized Francophonie has given an important place to economic cooperation, adopting a specific strategy in this field in November 2014 during the Summit in Dakar.

The economic strategy common in the Francophone space falls within a "vision that places the individual's development at the heart of the sustainable economic development process"<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, it contributes to the

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<sup>6</sup> International Organization of Francophonie, Report on the French Language in the World, Galimard, 2018 (Organization Internationale de la Francophonie, Report on the French Language in the World, Galimard, 2018)

<sup>7</sup> Economic Strategy for La Francophonie, 5th Conference of Heads of State and Government of Countries with French in common, Dakar (Senegal), November 29 and 30, 2014 / Stratégie économique pour la Francophonie, Ve Conférence des chefs d'État et de gouvernement des pays ayant le français en partage, Dakar (Sénégal), les 29 et 30 novembre 2014

implementation of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations Organization for sustainable development.

The key objective of the Francophone economic strategy is to “consolidate the Francophone economic space in order to answer the questions arising from the economic, social and environmental challenges, as well as the increased imbalances of the global economic and financial system”.<sup>8</sup>

The strategy falls into two major axes: 1. Promotion of an economy focused on the individual and his development and 2. Consolidation of the Francophone economic area in a space of exchanges, cooperation, privileged solidarity.

While also encouraging the use of the French language and valorization of multilingualism, the Strategy aims at “contributing to economic growth, reducing inequalities, poverty, protecting the environment and preserving the cultural heritage”.<sup>9</sup> In order to achieve these objectives, the economic strategy calls upon the strengthening of the democratic processes, of the rule of law, governance, human rights and gender equality.

The strategy cannot be implemented, however, without the commitment, involvement and action of the member states and governments, associate members and observers of OIF, as well as all the actors of the Francophonie: the 5 operators (the Francophone University Agency, TV5Monde, Senghor University of Alexandria and the International Association of Francophone Mayors/AIMF); the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophonie (APF); Ministerial Conferences (Confémen and Conféjes); the institutional and professional partner networks; the private sector; the regional integration organizations, major international courts and institutions, as well as multilateral financial donors.

On the background of this concern, in June 2017, the Observatory of the Economic Francophonie (OFE) was created at the initiative of the University of Montreal, in partnership with the Ministry of International Relations and Francophonie of Québec, of the Francophone University Agency (AUF) and of course of the International Organization of Francophonie. OFE provides the partners of the Francophonie (governments, enterprises, public and private bodies) with high-quality studies and an extensive network of expertise committed to the achievement of economic analyses on developing countries, mostly from the African space (Ndao, 2008).

Some of the types of action referred to in the text of the economic strategy are the following: 1. mobilization (member states and governments, public and private actors of the Francophone economic area) organized in order to participate in the creation of values, distribution of wealth and strengthening of social connections; 2. cooperation (with the means available, OIF initiates and deploys actions, operations and projects to strengthen the capacity of Francophone actors and improve governance, as well as to develop partnerships between economic

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<sup>8</sup> Idem

<sup>9</sup> Idem

actors), influence and lobby (OIF together with the member states and governments promotes and protects ideas and messages before international and regional courts, that are involved in the economic, trade, finances and development field: UN, OCDE, FMI, G20 etc.)

An economic commission formed within OIF with the participation of all the member states and governments and observers provide periodical feedback on the economic strategy of the Francophonie, setting the roadmap for its implementation.

### **Weaknesses: Challenges in the process of implementation of the Francophone economic strategy**

The main challenge of the strategy is its efficient and full implementation, and difficulties arise particularly from the characteristics of the Francophone space: 1. it includes vast territories distributed on the 5 continents, with various specificities, cultures, societies and institutions; 2. it includes states that are different in terms of the level of development (some OIF member states are in G8 and G20, while more than 20 Francophone African states are among the least advanced countries); 3. socio-economic differences and emergence of the new geopolitical and security challenges.

Moreover, we must not forget that OIF depends on the willingness of the national administrations to reach an agreement, to open the respective markets and to align their economic policies. Added to this are the differences in administrative and institutional capacity, which are obviously closely related to the huge economic disparities existing between Francophone countries (Ghali, 2002).

Another vulnerable point is related to the fact that OIF does not have a very large budget available for its activities (EUR 85 million), compared to other international organizations. Nevertheless, the organization is making strenuous efforts to carry out initiatives and projects in the Francophone space that generate sustainable economic development in the spirit of solidarity and cooperation. The voluntary contributions of the national administrations, as well as the takeover of certain expenditures by the Francophone actors involved (the private sector, the civil society or the NGOs) give strength and support in achieving the objectives listed on the roadmap of the strategy (Senghor, 1993).

Added to this is a certain distrust in the capacity of the organization to support and deploy major projects in the Francophone space that is sometimes seen in certain economic analyses. In parallel with the critical voices claiming that the economic strategy of the Francophonie is still in a conceptual phase, namely the discourse regarding the need to establish a common, equal and sustainable development, many world leaders point out that this is not the time for the interest herein to drop, particularly in the context of the alarming demographic evolution that characterizes the African continent (forecasts indicating an 8% increase by 2030).

On the other hand, there is still the matter of the use of the French language (driver of business prospects and job creation), that can also have a negative influence on the consolidation of the Francophone economic area. In the absence of major efforts, we could witness a recoil of the use of the French language in the Francophone space, respectively a drop in the number of Francophones under pressure from the competition with other international or local languages, as well as on the background of certain difficulties by Francophone countries in the South to provide youth access to education in case of a demographic boom.

The French language remains an economic tool that can generate revenue and opportunities for the Francophone populations. It is estimated that the digital cultural products in the Francophone space (tutorials, applications, digital books) could help create millions of jobs throughout the world, but provided that the digital gap in the Francophone space is solved. The digital conversion of the economy, whose crucial nature was visible during the health crisis, will rapidly increase in the following period. Its main advantage could come from the exploitation of big data, and its opportunities are basically found around the increasing number of AI applications.

### **Opportunities: New prospects of strengthening the economic dimension of the Francophonie**

The institutionalized Francophonie proves its weight at international level by the fact that the 88 member states and governments and observers of OIF manage to agree on and support joint positions at international level in the economic field.

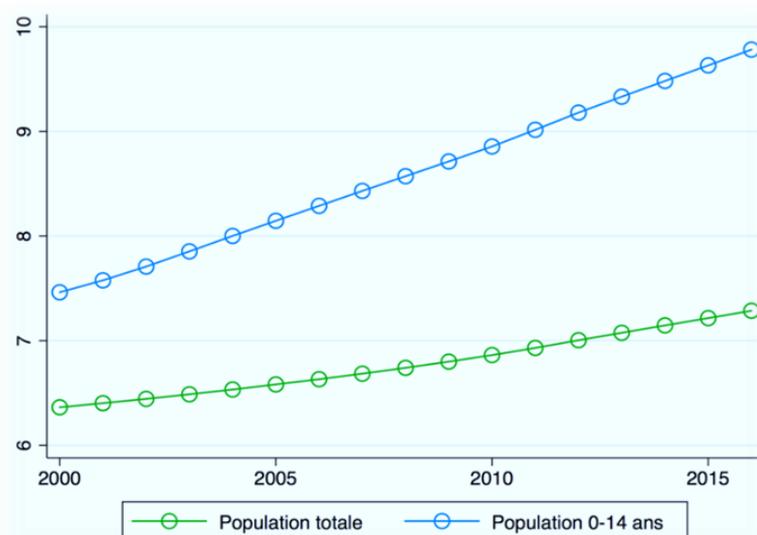
According to the 2018 Report of the Observatory of the French Language, the Francophone community accounts for 16% of the world's population and 16.5% of the world's gross income<sup>10</sup>.

The demographic dimension is one of the main challenges, that can play both ways, either positively or negatively, depending on the adjustment of economic policies that could handle such dynamics.

According to the Report of the Observatory of the French Language published in 2018 by OIF, the population in the Francophone space was estimated to 300 million, with an upward trend recorded in the last 20 years (an annual average of 2% per year). Thus, while in 2000 it accounted for 6.4% of the world's population, it went up to 7.3% in 2016. According to the forecasts made by the researchers within the Observatory who analyzed this trend, the number of Francophones is estimated to reach 700 million in 2050, respectively 8% of the world's population, 85% in Africa alone.

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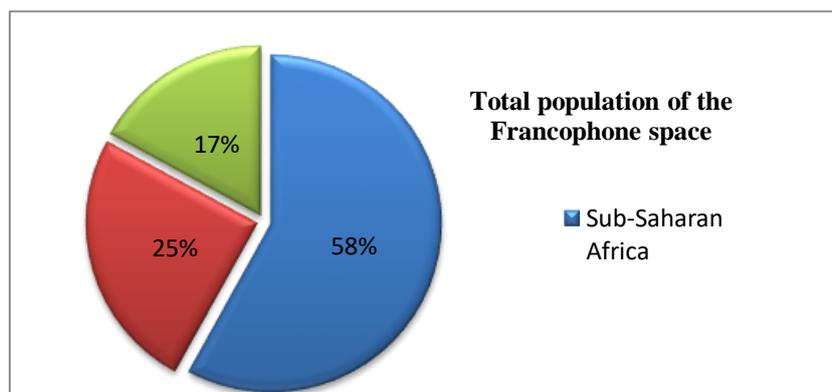
<sup>10</sup> International Organization of Francophonie, Report on the French Language in the World, Galimard, 2018



**Chart 1. Evolution of the Francophone population in the world (%) in the period 2000-2016**

*Source:* Calculation by the Observatory of the French Language starting from the data published in 2017 by the World Bank

The biggest evolution is recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa, where, according to the same source, 58% of the world’s Francophone population is found, followed by Europe and North Africa with 25% and Maghreb with 17%. With a population growth rate that is double the world average, the Sub-Saharan Africa risks a serious worsening of the economic situation.

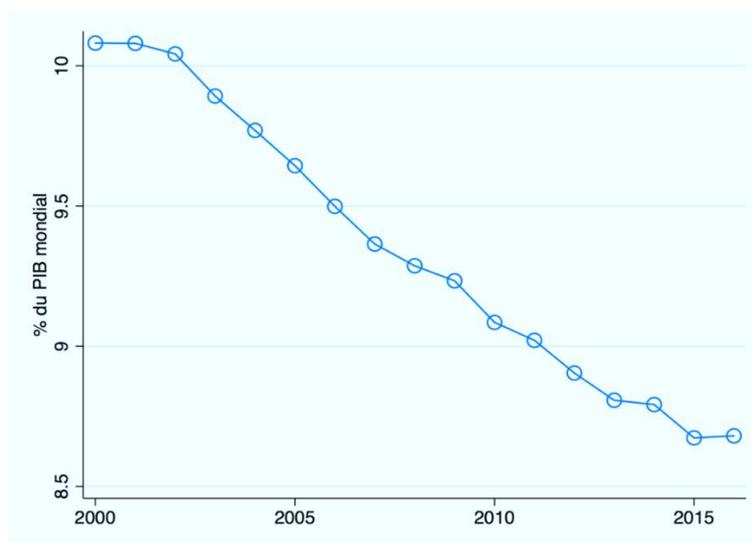


By seeking answers to the relevance and efficiency of a Francophone economic area, the researchers within the Observatory of the French Language within OIF addressed the concept of “economic value of the French Language”.

This approach starts from the idea that the estimate economic value of a language can be equivalent to the evaluation of the “economic weight” that its speakers account for in a certain space or in the world, taking into account indicators such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Phan et. al., 2013).

The economic effects of the use of a language can be observed both at microeconomic level (at the level of a company), and at macroeconomic level (at the level of a country or region).

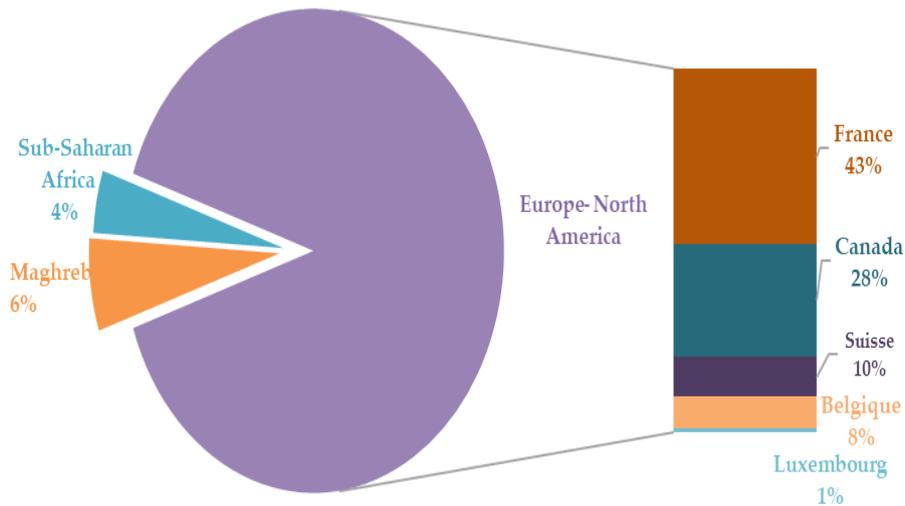
Taking into account only the countries which have French as the official language (respectively a total of 33 Francophone countries out of 88), the whole represents 7.3% of the world’s population and 8.7% of the global GDP (of which 90% are achieved in Northern countries), according to the study conducted by researcher Maria Masood for the Observatory of the French Language in 2018. Thus, we note the fact that the economic evaluation of the Francophone space is greater than the demographic one. In 2016, 7 countries within the Francophone economic area had a growth rate higher than 5%, all being from Sub-Saharan Africa: Ivory Coast (8.8%), Senegal (6.6%), Rwanda and Burkina Faso (5.9%), Mali (5.3%), Guinea (5.2%), Niger (5%). In turn, the richest countries in this space, except for Luxembourg, had an economic growth lower than the average within the area (2.6%) in 2016.



**Chart 2. Evaluation of the GDP of the Francophone area (% in US currency in 2010) in the period 2000-2016**

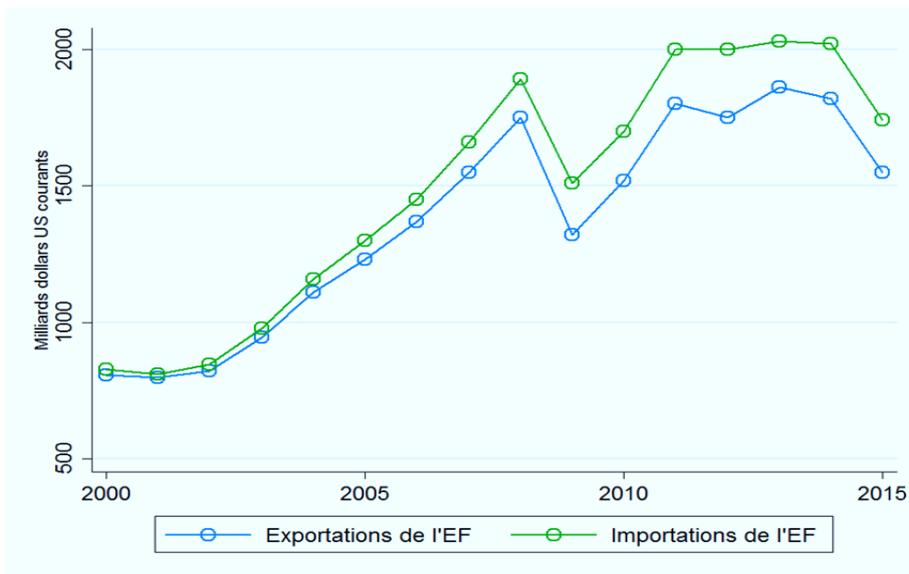
*Source:* Calculation by the Observatory of the French Language starting from the data published in 2017 by the World Bank

Moreover, according to the same source, the distribution of wealth in the Francophone space shows that 90% of the Francophone GDP is produced by the countries in the North, followed by the Maghreb countries (6%) and the Sub-Saharan African countries (4%), as shown in the chart below.



**Chart 3. Geographic distribution of the GDP (% , US currency in 2010), 2016**  
 Source: calculation by the Observatory of the French Language starting from the data published in 2017 by the World Bank

For the countries in the Francophone economic area, the existence of the French language as a common element is an added value. In numbers, 18% of the additional trade flows on average between countries of the Francophone space and a 4.2% increase of wealth per inhabitant on average.



**Chart 4. Intra-francophone trade in goods (%), 2000-2015**  
 Source: calculation by the Observatory of the French Language starting from the data published in 2017 by the World Bank

From this chart, it can be noted the evolution of exchanges within the Francophone space in the period 2000-2015, where the big slump during the 2008 financial crisis is seen, as well as the resilience of the trade flow between countries belonging to the same linguistic space, which enabled a mitigation of the effects of the crisis on the national economies. This experience proved that the trade with partners within the Francophone space can add value in crisis situations, representing an option that is worth exploiting more in terms of the strategy of the Francophone economic space (Attali, 2014).

The main axes where the Francophonie can intervene as part of its economic strategy are: support for national digital strategies; fostering the development of artificial intelligence from and within the Francophone space; growth of entrepreneurial ecosystems; boosting lobbying actions at international level to support key positions. More than anywhere, in the African Francophone space, there is a need for supporting certain innovative policies to reduce inequalities at individual level (revenues, jobs, mobility possibilities), as well as, in particular, at the level of states and enterprises. According to OCDE, beyond the impact on social cohesion, increased inequalities are detrimental to long-term economic growth. It is estimated, for instance, that the expansion of inequalities at the level of revenues between 1985 and 2005 in OCDE member countries led to the loss, on average, of 4.7 points of the cumulative growth rate between 1990 and 2010 in OCDE countries. According to a study conducted by the IMF, “an increase by one percentage point of the GDP in the revenues for the poor and middle class translates into an increase of up to 0.38 percentage points of the GDP for five years. On the other hand, the increase by one percentage point of the GDP in the revenues of the rich translates into a decrease by 0.08 points of the GDP”. In other words, in order to have real growth, inequalities must be reduced at the level of the social classes, as well as between the countries within the space.

For the institutional Francophonie, the economic dimension remains an open worksite that offers many development opportunities, provided that there is a coherent and lasting vision, cooperation and solidarity between member states being an insufficiently used advantage.

### **Threats: OIF in the current multilateral space**

Several trends can be identified at the level of the Francophone space, which can affect the implementation of the Francophone missions and, in particular, OIF’s economic strategy, that is a serious ambition for supporting the sustainable development of the member states, associate members and observers.

Among the biggest threats that can affect a coherent and efficient implementation of the Francophone economic strategy, there are the demographic and security aspects, the current forecasts regarding the significant increase of population in the Francophone states, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, most of them presenting an economic gap compared to the countries in the North. The Francophone space is, undoubtedly, a space of contrasts and cooperation is not always the easiest task.

An accelerated demographic evolution in Africa can generate, in the absence of reforms and prevention actions, serious economic issues: increased unemployment, rise of conflicts and social tensions, as well as shortages in the education system. Training and educating the youth in less developed Francophone countries, with population growth tendencies, remains a challenge for the institutional Francophonie. A significant trend is currently noted arising in the form of a shortage of professors, especially French language professors in many Francophone states. This shortage is real and a forecast for 2030 made by UNESCO shows that Sub-Saharan Africa currently needs 6.2 million primary-school teachers. Needs are higher than teacher recruitment and training, comprising the need for ongoing training of teachers and provision of teaching materials and customized educational programs. In order to improve this situation, OIF has recently started a mobility program for French language teachers within the Francophone space.

Moreover, we should not forget that there is a series of political and security crises, regional conflicts and social insecurity within this space. Events such as: war against terrorism in Mali, the coup d'état in Central Africa or the electoral tensions in Burundi. With regard to terrorism and related issues, such as migration and religious extremism, the Francophone space is largely affected and we often hear about the need to act at the source in the public discourse of world leaders. In short, the vulnerabilities generated by these two variable factors can seriously affect the implementation of the priority development objectives of the Francophone space.

The biggest threats for the Francophone states remain, however: wars, coups d'état, catastrophes, health crises, which create regression and instability. Such events can seriously affect the efforts made in these societies to ensure education focused on labor demand, to develop entrepreneurship and to support the local business environment.

A major change that could impact the space is that of the economic conditions of the Francophone countries. The economic gap between the countries within the Francophone space, as well as the economic falls can generate instability and the direct consequence could be increased social instability, which in many states in the area can rapidly take the form of lasting wars. However, now more than ever, we are aware that the effects of conflicts in the region will not remain in the area, but will be exported in other areas. Migration is a notable example in this respect. This is the price of the globalization we enjoy, but which can also have less desirable implications (Arnaud, S. et. al., 2005).

Lastly, another variable that needs to be taken into account is that of the development of the information technology, respectively the digital field. The matter of accessibility is an aspect that makes the difference when we talk about economic growth in the African space. Development and retention of structures that can enable access to the digital field remains a major challenge in many African states. Many policies are implemented in order to facilitate access to the Internet, the current tool of access to information and opportunities in a globalized

world. However, studies show that the largest penetration rate is registered in North America (95%) and in Europe (85.2%). Despite numerous efforts, Africa remains at the bottom of the ranking with a percentage of only 35%.<sup>11</sup> OIF can play a major role in supporting the national strategies in the digital field, focusing on the aspects where the Francophonie can add value: human resources (strengthening capacities and competences), regulatory framework, governance and legislative framework.

In order to have a coherent model for stimulating economic growth, a prerequisite is that of funds invested, on the one hand by the member states themselves and, on the other hand, by OIF and other international organizations through development programs. As a matter of fact, these funds allocated by the Francophone countries for the economic field are also important in terms of their positioning within the institutional Francophonie.

### 3. Conclusions

The 50-year anniversary is a key moment in the history of the organization, determined to evolve towards a change of paradigm in addressing the intervention lines, the strategic priorities and the roadmap for the following period. The central challenge is its repositioning on the international stage and increasing visibility and efficiency in the Francophone space, particularly by identifying specific niches of action in fields where OIF can add value, with sustainable development being targeted as a priority. The revised approach is considering the adaptation to the current realities and to the demands and expectations of the Francophone population on the 5 continents.

The development of the economic Francophonie is particularly important because, in the current society characterized by globalization and constant development of information technologies, we can no longer speak of culture without considering the economic dimension. International exchanges of cultural assets form one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy. The Francophonie has a message to promote on the international stage with regard to the aid for development and support for the least developed Francophone economies. Globalization has opened new perspectives for the Francophone space. For instance, 70% of Chinese people learn French in view of developing relations with the African continent, which shows great potential in terms of investments. Added to this is the development of information technologies and increased accessibility to the Internet, respectively to the digital environment, which provides opportunities for the potential investors within or outside of the Francophone space. Technology and, in particular, the one related to simultaneous translations is an opportunity for the Francophone space in the fight against the supremacy of the English language, including in the business environment. Using the same language

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<sup>11</sup> 2018 Report on the situation of the Francophonie in numbers, Idest 2018; [rappornumerique@idest-paris.org](mailto:rappornumerique@idest-paris.org)

and sharing the same humanist values are significant factors in creating strong socio-economic connections.

In the light of adapting the institutional governance of the Francophone project in the sense of increasing the chances of success of OIF's economic mission, three main directions are identified:

- The need to establish the will to attract and train the future actors of the global economy as absolute priority. Specifically, this means proposition of attractive and competitive pathways of excellence, as well as consideration of technical aspects, such as: changing the requirements for obtaining visas in view of stimulating the mobility of the economic actors in the Francophone space; analyzing the possibility to work during one's studies or providing opportunities to have working experience in another country within the Francophone space, preferably in a country with better economic development in order to gain experience and subsequently leverage it in the country of origin. In other words, better conditions for mobility and welcoming in countries within the Francophone space.

- The need to promote, support and develop French as a working language in large enterprises. For instance, the Tourbon law in France or the Charter of the French Language in Quebec set out the fundamental right to work in French. I will take this analysis further and propose the strengthening of connections between Francophone companies, French institutions and alliances, which are often field operators, in view of promoting and supporting sectoral professional training programs in French, adapted to the specificity of the society where the company operates. For instance, particular attention is required in certifying these training programs so that the companies are able to assess and control their investments and enable the beneficiaries to become holders of internationally-recognized diplomas.

- The need to make the economic Francophonie more visible, more offensive and more attractive worldwide, especially in the large financial and international expertise institutions. The forecasts related to the demographic evolution in Africa are not to be neglected (the number of Francophones will increase from 300 million to more than 700 by 2050), representing a major opportunity that needs to be exploited in terms of education and training focused on the market demand, but, in particular, in terms of the possibility to get the position of influence at international level.

The current institutionalized Francophonie has all the elements required to succeed in its economic mission, having the capacity to gather together all the political actors (member states and governments), economic actors (state-owned and private) and social actors (civil society, NGOs).

The political and financial strength and legitimacy of the member states, associate members and observers can be leveraged in order to implement an ambitious roadmap for the development of the Francophone economic space, which could evolve from an optimistic perspective in a more formalized

framework, as it happened within the European Union with the European Economic Area.

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