

Dynamics of Friendliness of Communication Regimes of Neighboring Countries (Based on the Results of Annual Monitoring)

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Abstract. The article contains the results of monitoring the friendliness of communication regimes in the post-Soviet countries and an analysis of the friendliness rating of these countries for 2022. The author identifies a number of trends: the strengthening of the polarization of friendly and unfriendly communication regimes; strengthening state control over information content and communication channels; reducing the subjectivity of civil society institutions as actors of communication regimes; increased pressure on the Orthodox Church. Fluctuating type of communication regimes are revealed, in which, according to the author, one should expect changes in the conditions of communications with Russia. It spoken about critically significant factor in the successful promotion of Russia's interests – the development of special communication strategies for intercountry interactions. The author argues that the phenomenon of "post-Soviet" is alive and is used by different countries either to build up friendly communications or to increase hostility towards Russia.

Keywords: communication regime, friendly countries, post-Soviet space, near abroad, friendliness rating, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Estonia

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Introduction

The dynamics of the communication regimes of foreign countries is a significant indicator of the development of relations with the Russian Federation. Established rules, regulations and conditions of communication either promote or hinder friendship and good neighborliness. It is in the communication regimes that the degree of friendliness towards Russia and Russians is manifested.

The concept of communication regimes was developed by scientists of the National Communications Development Research Institution (hereinafter NCDRI) in 2020 and since then 14 countries have been regularly monitored. Research methods are being improved, the range of interested experts is being expanded and research sites are being established in foreign countries. Over the years NCDRI has held dozens of scientific discussions, the materials of which were published in this journal (1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11), it also published scientific articles and reports (12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19). This article contains the results of the monitoring in 2022 and describes a number of trends in the development of the communication regimes of neighboring countries.

Materials and Methods

The communication regime is considered in 10 communication groups: foreign policy communications (including Russia's status as a partner state, ally in political and economic relations); civil communications (including attitude towards Russia, towards Russians (with Russians), rights of the Russian-speaking population); communications in the field of education (including in Russian); communications in the field of science (including in Russian); communications in the field of culture; media communications; communications of civil society institutions (including non-profit institutions); freedom of movement; other forms of communication (including religious, youth, etc.).

In each communication group, indicators of friendly communication regimes (total 68 indicators for 10 communication groups) were allocated. All indicators were ranked according to their degree of importance (the most significant, important and least important for determining the friendliness of communication regimes). Weights are assigned to the indicators according to the degree of their importance.

Monitoring consisted of six stages: 1) collecting empirical information on 68 indicators, analyzing the data obtained and the country context. Compilation of the rating 1 on the basis of the consensus assessment of NCDRI experts; 2) conducting interviews with experts in the field of international cooperation, representatives of international organizations, international units in the authorities, scientific, educational, cultural, religious, etc. organizations. Compilation of rating 2 based on consensus assessment; 3) Conducting a series of scientific discussions with representatives of foreign countries (the communication regimes of which were evaluated) to discuss ratings 1 and 2, the assessments



Figure 1. Rating of friendliness of country regimes – 2022

Source: Developed by The National Communications Development Research Institution NICRUS.RU

received, conclusions and clarification of issues; 4) The survey of experts from foreign countries (the sample of experts is not random, according to a given quota (for each country) and criteria for the selection of experts. The sample of foreign experts was 173 people. Russian - 50 people. Based on the survey, rating 3 was compiled; 5) Based on the method of the sum of countries' places in the ratings 1, 2, 3 the integral rating of the friendliness of the communication regimes has been compiled. The rating for each country can vary from -100 to 100, reflecting the degree of unfriendliness/friendliness of the communication regime.

Sample of countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

The empirical basis of the research was as follows: normative legal acts creating conditions and regulating ten types of communications in each country; state strategic documents, speeches, statements of heads of states; current practices (decisions and actions) of participants in communications; current and reproducing traditions, customs, habitual patterns and narratives; country media reports that allow to assess attitudes towards Russia and Russians; statistics; results of expert interviews and opinion polls.

Results

Based on the results of the monitoring, the rating of friendliness of communication regimes of neighboring countries was compiled (Figure 1).

Three groups of countries were identified according to the degree of friendliness of their communication regimes. Table 1 illustrates these countries and shows the dynamics of friendliness compared to 2021.

Table 1. Rating of friendliness of communication regimes of foreign countries (on the results of monitoring in 2022)

Place	Countries	Rating score (max 100) 2022	Rating score (max 100) 2021	Dynamics
Friendly communication regimes				
1.	Belarus	88,4 (1)	70,6 (2)	▲
2.	Kyrgyzstan	60,6 (2)	58,1 (4)	▲
3.	Uzbekistan	59,3 (3)	48,1 (7)	▲
4.	Kazakhstan	58,4 (4)	71,0 (1)	▼
5.	Armenia	58,3 (5)	61,7 (3)	▼
6.	Tajikistan	57,9 (6)	55,1 (6)	▲
7.	Azerbaijan	57,0 (7)	57,7 (5)	▼
8.	Turkmenistan	47,1 (8)	14,5 (8)	▲
Relatively friendly communication regimes				
9.	Georgia	24,2 (9)	4,4 (10)	▲
10.	Moldova	8,3 (10)	5,3 (9)	▲
Unfriendly communication regimes				
11.	Latvia	-45,8 (11)	-29,0 (12)	▼
12.	Lithuania	-49,0 (12)	-47,1 (14)	▼
13.	Estonia	-51,8 (13)	-10,7 (11)	▼
14.	Ukraine	-83,6 (14)	-43,8 (13)	▼

Source: Developed by The National Communications Development Research Institution NICRUS.RU

Belarus became the leader of the friendliness rating in 2022, having received high scores in all types of communications and confirmed the status of the Union state. The friendliness of foreign-policy communications and dialogue with Russia were especially evident at critical moments - in the context of increasing Western anti-Russian sanctions, the Special military operation, information war and the rise of Russophobia.

The second place was taken by Kyrgyzstan, which ranked fourth in 2021. The score of Kyrgyzstan's friendliness has not changed significantly (58.1 in 2021, 60.6 in 2022), but in the overall rating Kyrgyzstan moved to higher positions, partly due to the decline in the quantitative indicators of a number of other countries.

Uzbekistan improved its position in 2022, rising from seventh position to third. First of all, by improving the conditions and intensity of economic communications, and increasing communications in the sphere of culture. We note in particular the political will of the country's leadership to strengthen friendly relations with Russia, which other actors of the communication regime of Uzbekistan are guided by.

Kazakhstan ranked fourth. In 2022, experts gave lower scores for the foreign policy communications group. In general, we consider the communication regime of Kazakhstan

to be a fluctuating one. In such regimes there are contradictory decisions and contradictory conditions for developing communications with Russia. Fluctuating regimes are likely to review the principles and norms of country communication regimes in 2023.

In 2022, friendliness of communication regime of Armenia declined, and the country ranked fifth compared to the third place in 2021. Experts gave the lowest scores compared to 2021 for the group of foreign policy communications. Like Kazakhstan's, Armenia's communication regime is fluctuating. The factor of fluctuations and inconsistencies in the communication of Armenia with Russia in many respects was deepening of relations and consultations with foreign political attractors, not friendly to Russia. At the same time, within Armenia itself, the preconditions for an escalation of unfriendliness (especially in the economic and humanitarian sectors) are not mature yet. There is a lack of consensus and even a split of political elites concerning the strategy and tactics of relations with Russia. Pushing Armenia to become more unfriendly to the conditions and principles of communication with Russia is likely to lead to an increase in the communication gap between the authorities and society, destabilization of the country, loss of the ability of the authorities to maintain the stability of the socio-political system.

The positions of Tajikistan in 2022 remained the same. The country ranks sixth in the rating. Despite the fact that a number of experts noted some decline in friendliness in the group of foreign-policy communications, in general, norms and rules of communication have not changed significantly, and in the field of education have strengthened.

The seventh place was taken by Azerbaijan, which ranked fifth in 2021. The rating downgrade is due to scores for the foreign policy communications group. However, strengthening of economic ties of Azerbaijan with Russia, preservation of communications in the field of science, education and culture, youth communications were noted. At the same time, there was a cultural and historical, civilizational break with Russia, strengthening integration with Turkey and foreign policy alliance with NATO countries.

Turkmenistan took eighth place, maintaining its position in the rating of friendly communication regimes, but increasing it in numerical terms. First of all due to higher scores in the groups of economic, cultural and foreign policy communications, compared to 2021. It should be noted that Turkmenistan remains the most difficult country to monitor communication regimes. This is actually the feature of the communication regime itself. There are no data and documents that are important for analysis in the public domain. It is difficult to find experts from the country. However, the changes that have taken place in the past year give hope not only to better access to data, but also to better political, economic, cultural and other communication, as well as to a positive dynamic of friendliness in relations with the Russian Federation.

Georgia rose from tenth place to ninth place, receiving higher scores in the group of economic communications. The lowest scores of experts were given concerning foreign policy communications, which, as in the previous year, remain unfriendly. Diplomatic relations between the two countries have not been restored, which makes it very difficult to build communications in all spheres.

Moldova took the tenth place, closing the group of relatively friendly communication regimes and almost reaching the threshold of unfriendliness. The results of the monitoring in 2021 and 2022 show a consistent movement of Moldova according to the Baltic scenario of alienation from Russia, growth of hostility and preferences for radical anti-Russian forces.

The group of unfriendly communication regimes included Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, whose hostility increased compared to 2021. Ukraine took the first place among unfriendly countries. No institutional forms of communication are possible, except for civic interpersonal communication (which is also very difficult). Estonia ranks second among unfriendly countries. Estonia regards Russia as a threat in its actions, policies and official documents. Lithuania ranks third in the rating of unfriendly countries. In 2022, it escalated anti-Russian hostile rhetoric and adopted a number of unfriendly documents, recognizing Russia as a state that «supports and carries out terrorism». Latvia ranks fourth among unfriendly countries. Russia is considered «the main threat to national security». The Baltic States have consistently restricted and prohibited any communication with Russia, discriminated against the population for their nationality and language, increased hostility against Russia and Russians, cultivating Russophobia, using pressure and criminal prosecution of citizens for public disagreement with the position of the ruling elite.

Discussion

Interpretation of the results obtained during the annual monitoring reveals some trends in the development of friendly and unfriendly communication regimes of neighboring countries.

Phenomenon of the “Post-Soviet”

The phenomenon of «post-Soviet» continues to live and influence the decisions and actions of political and social forces of the former republics of the USSR. Paradoxically, it is the “post-Soviet” that is one of the key factors determining the internal strength and international status of these countries. They either continue to struggle with the «post-Soviet heritage», articulating the problems of “oppression” of peoples and their identity, «forced annexation», strengthening the unfriendliness, or rely on the “post-Soviet” speaking about the established national economic relations and security system, maintaining friendly communications, appealing to historical ties for the implementation of new economic and social projects. In any case, the «post-Soviet» continues to bring political, ideological, economic dividends and benefits to the former republics of the USSR.

Communication Gap Between Authorities and Society

The results of expert surveys and analysis of public processes in neighboring countries show a gap (in some countries - a significant gap) between the position of authorities and

the attitude of the population towards Russia and Russians. Societies have proved more sensible than their political elites. The intensification of unfriendly and hostile rhetoric on the part of the political elite, in most cases, does not cause an increase in the unfriendliness among the population of these countries. The socio-psychological experiment of erasing from people's memories their family stories, personal impressions, memorable events, family ties and identities is not easy to carry out. People resist even in those societies where this experiment has entered the stage of its "blossoming" (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and even more where this experiment on people is in the initial stage (Moldova).

Civil Society under Political Pressure

Unlike political regimes, communication regimes have many more actors. This allows building inter-country communications at the level of non-political, non-state dialogues. In 2022, the practice of limiting the activity of non-political actors by political institutions became more frequent.

Non-State actors of communication regimes (public organizations and movements, self-organizing communities, institutions of civil journalism, etc.), whose growth of subjectivity we recorded in 2021, now, more and more often, are being turned into objects and instruments of political power (or political opposition) as well as business, which is connected with power or wants to gain it. This is done by changing the rules of communication, strengthening the control of the authorities over information content and information channels, the activities of civil institutions and applying severe sanctions to «violators» (up to criminal prosecution or destruction). In this context, civil society institutions (even those whose activities were initially non-political) are increasingly embedded in political constructs and interests.

Increasing Polarization and Division

In 2022, the polarization between friendly and unfriendly communication regimes increased. It is likely to continue in 2023. In unfriendly countries censorship of information content is likely to increase, radical groups of communicators will receive preferences and leave the legal field, securitization of identity, which we have identified in a number of country communication regimes as early as 2021 (4), will continue.

Undoubtedly, special military operation being conducted in Ukraine has become the factor of the polarization of the countries' communication regimes. Media coverage of special military operation demonstrates the degree of friendliness or hostility towards Russia and allows us to predict what political, humanitarian and economic vectors political elites will choose for their countries.

Small countries with no strong economic potential and no decisive weight in international relations have to balance between Russia and the "collective West", whose investments are quite significant in the post-Soviet countries. The exception in this matter is Belarus, which despite its border with the EU and NATO countries, has retained pragmatism and remained

true to its alliance with Russia. The opposite exceptions are the countries of the Baltic States, the communication regimes of which has become completely anti-Russian and so hostile that it will soon become marginal even among "their own" countries of the "collective West".

In the future, the successful completion of special military operation will be a factor of consolidation of the countries around Russia and its allies, and the return of dialogues with the EU will affect the position of the Baltic countries, whose degree of autonomy and role is determined in the EU.

Political Pressure on Orthodoxy

Civilizational confrontation has intensified and religious division is being provoked. The debate about the subjects of dialogue and the clash of civilizations has moved from the realm of theoretical reasoning to that of practical solutions. Political institutions have become increasingly subjective in these processes, establishing norms, rules, principles and conditions for civilizational, cultural and religious dialogue. In some cases, new rules and principles provoke conflict, while in others they create conditions for peaceful coexistence. In unfriendly and relatively friendly countries, pressure has increased on the clergy of the churches of the Russian Orthodox Church in order to turn them into tools for solving the political tasks of the Western-oriented elites. In the perspective of the strengthening of division in Orthodoxy (in the Baltic countries, in Moldova, in Ukraine), bans on the Russian Orthodox Church will not only complicate the dialogue of religions and cultures, but can also provoke «religious wars», which tend to turn into protracted civil wars.

On Independence and Autonomy

The communication regimes of neighboring countries are largely determined by external factors. Firstly, they are oriented towards the strong one. Distancing or approaching Russia will depend on the success of the consolidation of non-Western countries, the results of the special military operation, Russia's economic power and the impact of Russian humanitarian policy abroad. In accordance with it, and depending on it, the norms, principles and priorities of communication with Russia will change in the coming years.

Secondly, the post-Soviet countries are not self-sufficient in terms of producing high-quality information content and financing competitive media. Let's be frank - restriction or prohibition of Russian and Russian-language media will inevitably lead to strengthening of other foreign media in the country's information space. The choice is small: if not Russian, then Western media (primarily the US). After a while, serious Arab media and growing Chinese and Turkish media will be interested. A popular proverb «sacred place is not empty» very appropriately characterizes ongoing processes. Modern media is primarily a business, and if the state is unable to support and finance them, then the media and their investors will maintain the state. Not all post-Soviet countries are able to create and finance large-scale media competing with Russian or Western media. From this point of view the choice of media partners is the choice of the degree of their independence.

Thirdly, the states under consideration are of great geo-economic importance as transit corridors for Russia and other countries. They are objectively linked to neighboring countries and are part of regional subsystems. This connection makes them inevitably dependent on each other, including Russia. In the context of diversifying the economic communications of major players, small countries that are included in these chains suffer or benefit from changing the rules and conditions. At present, in the context of diversification of Russia's economic communications, great opportunities have been opened for friendly countries to increase their international subjectivity, their economic potential, to expand their geo-economic opportunities and get the most advantageous projects and the best conditions for the realization of their economic interests.

Fluctuating Regimes

The friendliness of communication regimes in countries with fluctuating political vectors and fluctuating political discourse (e.g., Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) is largely maintained by homeostasis. This is possible for some time, provided there is no dynamics in the legal framework. But with more frequent political fluctuations, the regulatory framework of the communication regime is likely to change in the near future. Changes in the legal and regulatory framework will also affect the degree of friendliness, as we see in the example of Moldova (as an example of increasing unfriendliness) or in the case of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (as an example of growing friendliness). In the coming year, fluctuating types of communication are likely to alter the way information, communication, non-governmental organizations and humanitarian dialogues operate. The marker of the movement towards friendliness or hostility will be the policy towards the Russian language, Russian media and Russian business.

Integration Communication Formats

The CIS, EAEU, SCO and CSTO formats played an important role in the development of communications in 2022. The summits and forums held have become dialogue platforms for multilateral and bilateral discussions on political, economic and humanitarian issues. The year 2022 gave rise to large economic, geo-economic, humanitarian projects with the participation of Russia in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, the Caspian region, Belarus. Global communication in the BRICS format is developing. These projects will determine future relations with Russia and Russia's relations with partners. Despite the fact that political elites of neighboring countries are building new dialogues with foreign countries, including those unfriendly to Russia, close ties with Russia are more profitable. Cooperation with it remains an important factor in the political autonomy and socio-economic development of the post-Soviet countries.

Other integration formats, such as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), the Organization of Islamic States (OIC) influence the conditions and principles of communication with Russia. Within the framework of these formats, their own agenda is

formed, their own dialogues are built, and their own projects are initiated. Looking at the situation from the point of view of the leaders of these formats (primarily Turkey) suggests that they, like Russia, claim a systemically important role in the regions of the post-Soviet space. This factor should not be underestimated.

Conclusions

In 2022, the group of friendly communication regimes included 8 countries, relatively friendly – 2 countries and unfriendly – 4 countries. In the group of friendly countries, fluctuating communication regimes (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan) have been identified, which periodically make contradictory decisions regarding communications with Russia and Russians. At the same time, in these countries the internal preconditions of unfriendliness have not matured, even if ruling political elites decide to strengthen communications with the countries hostile to Russia. The vector of change will also depend on Russia's ability to choose the right communication strategies in relations with fluctuating regimes.

The main trends of 2022 are:

- polarization of friendly and unfriendly communication regimes: worsening of conditions for the development of communications (including prohibition) in unfriendly regimes (Ukraine, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia) and improvement of communication conditions in a number of friendly regimes, which were previously quite restrained (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan);
- improvement of conditions for the development of economic communications in a number of friendly countries (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) and relatively friendly countries (Georgia);
- strengthening State control over information content and communication channels, including social networks, in neighboring countries;
- reducing subjectivity of civil society institutions as actors of communication regimes. Civil society institutions are increasingly integrated into the system of political interests of elites (ruling or opposition);
- religious institutions, which in 2022 remained the channels of friendly communication even in unfriendly countries, are under pressure from the authorities and are forced to make political choices. Russian Orthodox Church, whose communications are restricted or prohibited, is under heavy pressure in unfriendly regimes;
- efforts and special projects and programs will now be required in a number of countries where the concept of friendliness (homeostasis mechanism) was previously replicated by inertia (Kazakhstan);
- the monopolization by Turkey of the «Turkic world» and the attempt to capitalize this concept leads to an increase in its influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which affects the change of directions and principles of priority communications of a number of countries in the field of culture;

● in our view, the development of communication strategies between countries is becoming a critical factor in the success of Russia's interests abroad and the development of a system of reliable foreign partners and allies.

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