

Socio-Political Factors of Humanitarian Communication between Georgia and Russia

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Abstract. The article considers the factors shaping the specifics of cooperation between Russia and Georgia in the humanitarian sphere. The authors state a decrease in the intensity of scientific, educational, and cultural communication. The impossibility of a final civilizational break is noted due to the commonality of the historical past, religion and culture. The key problem identified is the impossibility of building full-scale humanitarian cooperation due to the lack of diplomatic relations and the presence in Russia of a visa regime to Georgia. The pragmatic position of the Georgian ruling elite towards Russia, as well as the growth of the tourist flow of Russians to Georgia, are positive factors for the further development of cooperation in the humanitarian sphere. The authors conclude that in the absence of a political dialogue at the highest level, the impetus for the development of humanitarian cooperation can be given by organizations of the non-profit sector and diasporas of Georgians in Russia and Russians in Georgia. The article was based on the results of a scientific discussion held at the National Communications Development Research Institution (NIIRC), Moscow, Russia in 2022.

Keywords: Georgia, Russia, humanitarian cooperation, educational cooperation, communication mode, historical memory, friendliness, good neighborliness

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Introduction

In 2022, the National Research Institute for the Communications Development (NIIRK) monitored the communication regimes of neighboring countries. According to its results, Georgia entered the group of “relatively friendly” countries, that is, those that are on the verge of unfriendliness. At the same time, the country has risen one position in the Friendliness Rating compared to 2021, which was due to the development of Georgian-Russian economic relations and the position of the ruling party of Georgia regarding the inadmissibility of interrupting economic relations with Russia, which contribute to the implementation of Georgia’s economic interests. The ruling party also spoke out against the proposal to ban Russian citizens from entering Georgia. Russian tourists make up a large share of tourists and generate income for the country’s tourism industry. These decisions, against the backdrop of diplomatic relations severed in 2008, political tensions, Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic commitment, are assessed by experts as the ability of modern Georgia to rely on rational principles of relations with Russia and not follow the emotional path of the Baltic countries (1, 3, 4, 5). But how are the humanitarian communications between Georgia and Russia, which form the basis of relations between peoples, developing? This issue was discussed at the scientific discussion organized by NIIRK. The most informative and interesting positions of the round table participants are reflected in the article.

Materials and Methods

Author’s materials are based on extensive empirical data. To analyze the situation and argue their positions, the authors used: legal acts regulating Georgian-Russian relations; state strategic documents, texts of speeches, statements of heads of state; current practices (decisions and actions) of the participants in the Georgian-Russian humanitarian cooperation. Statistical data, materials of Georgian and Russian mass media are analyzed. The authors used the methods of content analysis, event analysis, statistical analysis, participant observation, deductive and inductive logic.

Results

Conditions and Features of the Development of Russian-Georgian Humanitarian Communications (A. A. Khidirbegishvili)

Russian-Georgian humanitarian cooperation over the past decades has often been determined by the political situation and the goals of those forces that came to power in Georgia in a particular period of time. The “progressive” Georgian intelligentsia in the post-Soviet

years of illusory independence promoted pro-American ideas and values and considered itself European. As for the traditional Georgian intelligentsia, which has great merits in science and art, its representatives, who did not emigrate to Moscow, St. Petersburg and other Russian cities, never lost ties with the Russian world and the Georgian diaspora in Russia.

Today, the country's ruling political elite is implementing a more rational foreign policy course. The government, the ruling party and the parliamentary majority have indignantly rejected the introduction of visas for Russians, warn of responsibility for insulting Russian tourists and criticize Western diplomats, politicians and political scientists who are intervening in Georgia's internal affairs. This is largely due to the fact that Russian citizens who entered Georgia after the start of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine registered a business for 711 legal entities, while 9,789 Russian citizens registered as individual entrepreneurs. From March 1 to October 12, 2,585 citizens of the Russian Federation have bought 2,964 apartments in Georgia with a total area of 189,084 sq.m; 252 citizens of the Russian Federation bought 249 land plots with an area of 37.9 hectares; 53 citizens of the Russian Federation purchased a plot without buildings and structures, 199 – with buildings or structures). From January to August, 977 Russian citizens were employed in Georgia, the amount on the accounts of Russian citizens in Georgian banks increased by \$1.2 billion. About a million Russian tourists visited Georgia during the season (more than 200 thousand per month). These are jobs and about three billion dollars that came to the state treasury from tourism, to the private sector, thanks to which the hotel and restaurant business revived, this is income for Georgian agricultural producers and winemakers, tour operators, drivers, guides and service workers. Today, the Georgian authorities have abandoned anti-Russian rhetoric and avoid the term “occupation”, which is actively criticized by opposition representatives in order to gain support from the most radical part of society. On the other hand, pro-American sentiments are still strong within the ruling elite. The current Minister of Education and Science of Georgia has been teaching at leading universities in America for twenty years. He continues to lecture in the United States, has close professional ties with professors at Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Yale, Columbia, Chicago, New York universities, as well as with scientists from Brown, Cornell and Johns Hopkins Universities.

Despite the balanced position of today's authorities, the years of anti-Russian propaganda and the transformation of the national education system are bearing fruit. During the years of Georgia's independence, there was a devaluation of the academic system of education, tested over the years – if formal lessons were held in schools, then by teachers who had been trained and received certificates from the Soros Foundation, and from falsified textbooks. Instead of good lectures at institutes, there are presentations, rallies and exchange programs under the patronage of the US Embassy (1, 2). The representatives of the younger generation were easily impressed: “Russia and the Russians are the historical enemies and occupiers of Georgia”. There is no opportunity to get acquainted with an alternative point of view due to the following circumstances:

The youth of Georgia do not know the Russian language, the study of which was prudently withdrawn from the programs for higher and secondary educational institutions,

and Russia's assistance in supporting the Russian language in Georgia was spent inefficiently (6, 7). There are only 11 Russian-language schools now throughout Georgia, and it is possible to study Russian in 45 sectors of Georgian schools. In 2020–2022, not a single new Russian-speaking private educational institution passed authorization. As of November 2022, the number of students in Russian-language schools is 16,042, of which 1,820 students arrived from Ukraine after February 24, 2022. Georgian youth, who come out with posters and stickers offensive to the Russian president, do not know Russia and Russians, because as far as they can remember, they cannot visit Moscow and St. Petersburg to see the sights – a strict visa regime, there is no direct flight;

There is virtually no more Russian-language journalism in Georgia. There are no Russian-language media in the country – Georgian printed and electronic publications in Russian, respectively, Georgia and Russia do not have a common information space (as Russian scientific circles now put it, “friendliness of country communication regimes”). Several Georgian publications, which have a selectively translated Internet version into Russian, are the result of the work of the last remaining translators in Georgia, and not journalists. And these bilingual publications, with the exception of GRUZINFORM, are notable for their anti-Russian editorial policy. Meanwhile, anti-Russian propaganda in Russian is spreading in Georgia, and not only with American or European grants, but with the money of fugitive representatives of the Russian opposition through local branches of the anti-Russian non-profit sector;

Everything Russian in the late 2000s was equated by the regime with treason and punished as treason and espionage. “Pro-Russian” sounded like a sentence; citizens suspected of this “terrible sin”, advocating the settlement of traditional Russian-Georgian relations and for dialogue with the Russian leadership, were shunned like lepers. And although the new government has unblocked Russian TV channels and lifted the ban on Russian stage in the public space, the ingrained animal fear of being suspected of being “pro-Russian” is still the norm in Georgia, because they are encouraged by the US Embassy, which has managed to consolidate around itself the anti-Russian part of the Georgian establishment, radical political parties and is in constant contact with former and current Western politicians, officials and diplomats, advisers and experts

Despite all this, Georgia has a lot of work to do with the Russian Federation, and this is not only the organization of summit meetings and the restoration of diplomatic relations, not only the expansion of economic and trade relations, but also the restoration and expansion of humanitarian and cultural cooperation, joint projects in the sphere of common past and historical memory.

The Policy of Historical Memory of Georgia (A. A. Khotivrishvili)

Historical memory is now one of the topical and debatable problems in social knowledge. Interest in this topic is due to the fact that for the full development of any society, it is necessary to think about the issues of preserving and passing on to future generations the experience, accumulated values, behavior patterns, elements of the national cultural

heritage. We consider historical memory as a special, constantly developing socio-cultural phenomenon; a set of knowledge, opinions, assessments, beliefs and ideas about events, phenomena and processes of the past, formed through specific socio-cultural actions and practices.

Among the main axioms of life is the statement: the history of each new generation does not begin with a “blank slate”, but with a legacy, good or bad, that its ancestors left to it. The study of such heritage is associated with the concept of historical memory as one of the most important socio-cultural phenomena of the existence of a person and society and as a factor that determines not only their present, but also the near and even distant future (2). The future of peoples is determined, first of all, by the experience accumulated earlier. It is impossible to cross out the past.

The importance of addressing the problem of historical memory increases in the situation of large-scale information wars, which in recent years have been waged with maximum intensity and bitterness. There is a clash of traditional images of the past with new ones that are being formed at the present time, places of memory and commemorative practices are being transformed, those that have been formed over a long period are deformed or even completely destroyed.

From the end of the 20th to the beginning of the 21st century, the process of virtualization of historical memory has been actively unfolding in the world, due to the emergence and rapid spread of new ways of commemorating the past. The consequence of this is the transformation of traditional means of storing and reproducing historical memory, the emergence of a huge number of electronic resources, the purpose of which is to update and retransmit knowledge about the past. But these resources are filled with content depending on the memory policy adopted in the country.

Diplomatic relations between Russia and Georgia were established at the end of the 15th century, when ambassadors of the same faith Iveria (Georgia) arrived at the court of Ivan III, who delivered a letter from the Kakhetian king Alexander I. The key treaty in the history of the two states is the Treaty of St. and the supreme power of the Russian Empire with the united East Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti (otherwise the Kartli-Kakheti kingdom, Eastern Georgia) about the transition of Georgia under the protectorate of Russia. It was concluded on July 24 (August 4), 1783 in the Georgievsk fortress (Northern Caucasus). Under Tsarist Russia and under the USSR, an immense number of people from Georgia took an active part in the creation and development of the general well-being of the country. In other words, our ancestors gave us a huge heritage in the form of a common history and a common past, but what did we manage to preserve and what do we have today?

For 30 years, the West has been trying with all its possibilities to impose its own values, to erase the common historical past of Russia and Georgia, to break the connection between the states. The question arises: who is the culprit of what is happening? Naturally, we ourselves. Endless unresolvable conflicts, lack of diplomatic relations, migration problems, transport problems, etc. give the representatives of the Western countries an opportunity to carry out their plan to interrupt good-neighbourly relations between Russia and Georgia. Although trade turnover between the countries has increased in recent years, it is too early

to talk about any serious breakthroughs. There are no large-scale investments at the level of the two states; there are no large joint projects.

The younger generation of Georgians and Russians has no contacts. Unfortunately, the thread that connected our ancestors has been broken. The youth of Georgia has no idea about Russia, about the values of the country, about the population, about culture, about programs in the field of education. They are under the influence of Western media, and it can be considered that they are in an information vacuum. We should think about how to interest the young generation of the two countries in restoring and strengthening ties that have existed for centuries.

In Georgia, historical memory has been preserved among those who are over 50 years old. These are people who were born in the Soviet Union, formed as individuals and specialists, were friends and honored the culture and traditions of peoples. After the collapse of the USSR, it is difficult for them to find themselves and adapt to the values that are relevant in Georgian society. Western values are alien to them, they want to visit Russia as before, without any restrictions, to cooperate in various fields, but, unfortunately, they are deprived of such an opportunity. The existence of a visa regime unilaterally creates restrictions for Georgians when visiting Russia. Georgia, for its part, since 2012 has been providing Russian citizens with an opportunity to stay in Georgia for 300 days without visas, without any restrictions. Why not reconsider the possibility of easing the visa regime for Georgian citizens?

Summing up, we note that today the “Brain washing” program in Georgia has been excellently implemented by the West. It is difficult to talk about the preservation of historical memory between the two states with so many problems. But given modern realities, the possibility of restoring lost connections is realistic.

Policy on the Russian Language and Russian-language Education (I. P. Goryunov)

According to the results of the annual monitoring of the friendliness of country communication regimes, conducted by the National Research Institute for the Development of Communications in 2022, Georgia was among the countries whose communication regime towards Russia can be determined as “relatively friendly”. The results of the monitoring were confirmed by the opinion of representatives of the expert community of Russia and Georgia, obtained during a round table organized by the National Research Institute for the Development of Communications in December 2022 ¹.

Regular negative public assessments of Russia’s activities in the international arena by representatives of the Georgian establishment, together with the lack of diplomatic relations between states and the course for accession to the European Union and NATO enshrined in the country’s Constitution, do not allow a more positive assessment of

¹ The experts discussed the results of the study of Georgia’s communication regime. National Research Institute for the Communications Development: official website. Available from: http://nicrus.ru/1912_resultatissledovaniya

Georgia's communication regime. However, the majority of the population does not have a hostile attitude towards Russians, which creates favorable conditions, for example, for tourism.

Russians remain one of the largest national minorities, their number is about 1% of the total population of the country. The intensification of the use of the Russian language in 2022 was due to a historical maximum in the number of Russians visiting Georgia: according to official data, over the past year the number of tourists from Russia has increased five times and exceeded 1.5 million. In addition, more than 112 thousand of them remained in the country, which is four times the number of Russians in Georgia (according to the latest population census). This is a permanent factor in the pressure of the opposition on the ruling party: representatives of the most radical political forces constantly criticize the country's leadership for being too kind on Russians and the Russian language, and Western NGOs publicly call for the introduction of a visa regime for Russian residents.

The right of representatives of national minorities to receive education in their native language is legislated. In 2022, there were about 300 non-Georgian-language public schools in Georgia (14% of the total number of schools in the country), 52,000 children studied in them (10% of the total). However, three-quarters of these schools are located in villages and are either Armenian or Azeri (5). The number of schools available to Russian-speaking residents of Georgia, who mostly live in Tbilisi and other large cities, is much smaller both in percentage and in quantity. The situation is the same with teachers of non-Georgian schools. In 2022, the number of Russian-speaking teachers is slightly more than 1 thousand people (16.9% of the total number of non-Georgian teachers and less than 1% of the total number of teachers in the country). In the future, for Russian relocators in Georgia, this may increase the shortage of places in Russian-speaking schools and hinder the observance of the educational rights of the Russian-speaking population. There is also a shortage of teachers in subjects related to the social sciences: by law, these disciplines must be taught in the Georgian language, and there is a catastrophic shortage of such specialists in Russian-language schools. There is no consistency in professional development programs for Russian-speaking teachers. The State Strategy of Georgia on Civil Equality and Integration for 2021–2030 states that native language textbooks for non-Georgian-speaking students “prevent the identification of students from ethnic minorities with Georgia as their homeland”. The task was set to accelerate the development and further implementation of Georgian textbooks in the native language for non-Georgian-speaking minorities. Their content may pose a serious threat to further educational communication, as Russian-speaking students in Georgian schools may cease to associate themselves with Russia and cease to identify themselves as part of the Russian world (6).

The situation is more complicated in the field of higher education. The state program “1+4” has been implemented for more than 10 years: within the framework of the Strategy for Civil Equality and Integration for Youth from Ethnic Minorities, a special preferential policy has been developed, providing for enrollment in a higher educational institution for a chosen specialty after passing the “Educational program for training in the Georgian language”. Over 10 years, by 2022, the number of program participants from among non-

Georgian schoolchildren has more than quadrupled and exceeded 1,000 people. In the future, this program will attract more and more non-Georgian-speaking schoolchildren in Georgia, which may reduce the interest of Russian-speaking youth in obtaining higher education in Russia (7).

Thus, educational opportunities for Russian-speaking residents of Georgia are legally fixed, but the state policy is aimed at attracting non-Georgian-speaking students to receive higher education in the state language. In addition, the publication by Georgia of its own textbooks in the Russian language may lead to the distancing of Russian-speaking youth from Russia, its culture and history, which poses a threat to the implementation of Russian humanitarian policy abroad.

Conclusions

Among the socio-political factors that determine the specifics of Russian-Georgian humanitarian communications, we especially note the lack of diplomatic relations, territorial claims, the Euro-Atlantic vector of Georgia and, as a result, the creation of a negative image of Russia by the presidential authorities, a unilateral visa regime, an unfriendly policy of historical memory towards Russia. Positive factors include the absence of a negative attitude towards Russians from the majority of society, the preservation of Orthodoxy, the pragmatic approach of the ruling elite to the issue of building economic relations with Russia and the inadmissibility of discrimination against Russians and Russian-speaking citizens of Georgia on a national basis.

On the other hand, the number of Russian-speaking schools, in the presence of a consistently high demand for secondary education in Russian, is declining every year, and there is a catastrophic shortage of competent Russian-speaking teachers. The strategic documents of Georgia recognize as one of the threats the use by national minorities of textbooks in their native language, printed outside of Georgia, a course has been taken to prepare Georgian textbooks on the languages of national minorities.

The actual absence of Russian-language journalism in the country is stated. The solution to this problem is seen in expanding the presence of Russian media in the information space of Georgia, considering the possibility of opening representative offices. In other words, there are few conditions and actors for the development of Georgian-Russian humanitarian communications. Contacts remain between the Orthodox Church, compatriots, and compatriots. But they practically do not involve young people, on whom relations between Russia and Georgia will depend in the future.

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