

The Friendliness of Armenia's Communication Regime: Towards the Question of Media and Public Attitudes

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the issue of friendliness as a category of the current state of the communication regimes of the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation. The orientation of the friendliness of the Armenian communication regime is largely determined by the sharp contradictions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the continuing tension in the Karabakh conflict zone, and the instability of the internal political situation. The confrontation of various political forces and the large role of the external factor have a great influence on the Armenian political discourse and favor the emergence of trends that are contrary to Russian national interests and can be considered by Russia as threats. The article analyzes the features of the news materials presented by the information and information-analytical agencies of Armenia in Russian. Information occasions, the emotional tone of information messages are studied, it is assessed how fully the Russian-language content reflects the events in the life of Armenian society and, in particular, the trends in the development of relations between Armenia and Russia. It is concluded that the potential for more detailed news coverage in Russian of Russian-Armenian relations, the results of cooperation between Russia and Armenia has not yet been revealed. 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: Communication regime, Republic of Armenia, political regime, information sovereignty, information space, media sphere

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Introduction

The friendliness of the country's communication regime in relation to another country is expressed in the presence of legal, political and socio-cultural conditions for the non-conflict development of various types of intercountry communications and the exchange of information between state and non-state actors. Friendliness contributes to the development of relations based on friendship and good neighborliness. Friendliness implies relations between countries based on mutual respect, mutual interests and values of peaceful coexistence in a multipolar world. In the first rating of friendliness of communication regimes of neighboring countries published by NIIRK, as of the end of 2021, Armenia is among the five most friendly communication regimes to Russia (1).

The fragmentation of the world communication order and the acute confrontation on the world stage increase the relevance of the analysis of the friendliness of the communication regimes of neighboring countries in (4). For three decades, Armenia has continued to be Russia's ally in the strategically important Caucasus region. For Armenia, Russia is the main guarantor of national security in the region, which continues to be one of the "hot spots" on the political map of the world. In a difficult situation for the entire South Caucasus, Armenia plays an important stabilizing role. Armenia's memberships in the collective security organization and its close ties with Russia have become an obstacle to the arrival in the region of those destructive external forces that could destabilize the situation in the vast territories of Asia and North Africa. At the same time, the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, tension in the Karabakh conflict zone and destructive activity in the US/NATO/EU region have a negative impact on the friendliness of the communication regime of Armenia towards the Russian Federation (2).

The public opinion of the Armenian society is traditionally positively oriented towards Russia as the main strategic partner, security guarantor and friendly state (3.5). Armenian-Russian relations had deep cultural and historical roots, based on the experience of positive cooperation over many centuries. And even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, friendly relations between our countries have been preserved, as evidenced by the joining of the independent Republic of Armenia to the CIS, the CSTO and the EAEU, created by Russia. However, after the so-called "velvet revolution" of 2018, the main goal of the political agenda of the new leadership of the republic was to change the geopolitical vector of Armenia. To achieve this goal, public organizations

financed by various Western funds, private media, Internet resources and social networks were involved. These attempts were especially intensified after Russia launched a special military operation in Ukraine. The information war launched by the West on an unprecedented scale against the Russian Federation is gradually penetrating the Armenian society. The desire to reformat the public consciousness in Armenia is becoming threatening. Therefore, regular research of public opinion and analysis of current trends is important. The results of sociological surveys and studies presented in the article serve as the basis for analyzing the impact of the information field and the media sphere on the public sentiments in Armenia (G.A.Poghosyan).

The political crisis in Armenia in the spring of 2018, which erupted after the implementation of the constitutional reform in Armenia in 2015 (as a result of the reform, Armenia switched from a presidential to a parliamentary form of government) and led to the coming to power in Armenia of a new Prime Minister N.Pashinyan, 44 – the daytime Karabakh war in the fall of 2020, early parliamentary elections in Armenia in June 2021, the crisis in resolving the conflict over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and border disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan contributed to qualitative changes in the socio-political discourse and public sentiment in Armenia in the context of the crisis, exacerbated the question of what will be the further development of Armenia's foreign policy ties, what could be effective crisis response measures within the framework of allied relations between Russia and Armenia. In the current conditions, it is relevant to assess the characteristics of the media in Armenia as one of the key subjects of the communication regime in the context of Russian-Armenian relations and the public opinion of the population of Armenia towards Russia.

Materials and Methods

The authors used different methodological approaches and methods for their research. The exchange of methods during the scientific discussion made it possible to identify the most effective and promising ones, which include systemic, problem-chronological and structural-functional approaches, as well as a comparative historical method. They made it possible to analyze the state of the Armenian information space and identify the main features of the communication regimes of the Republic of Armenia and the Russian Federation in modern geopolitical conditions. Discourse analysis of news of information and information-analytical agencies was also used. The empirical base of the study was news reports from information and information-analytical agencies of Armenia and Russia, the results of public opinion polls, the results of an analysis of the communication regime, and materials on the impact of the politically oriented media sphere on social consciousness.

Results

The Specifics of Presenting Information in the Russian-Language Information and Information-Analytical Agencies of Armenia (D.S.Ayvazyan)

Information and information-analytical agencies operating in Armenia (panarmenian.net, news.am, Armenpress, etc.) produce news materials both in Armenian and in Russian, English and other foreign languages. The Armenian diaspora lives in various countries of the world, in Armenia there are higher educational institutions teaching in Russian, English, French; tourism, which is important for Armenia, is developed, there are many Russian companies in Armenia (airlines, companies in the field of mobile communications, telecommunications, energy, etc.); therefore, for the development of Armenia's external relations, it is not enough to release news only in the Armenian language. Russian-language news agencies and media in Armenia also inform the Russian-speaking population of Armenia about the situation in the country (12:41–42).

Russian informative agencies news materials, as a rule, are sufficient for understanding the life in various spheres of Armenian society, Armenia's cooperation with the outside world, interaction with Russia, etc. and contain both textual material and photo and video materials. The tone of news reports in Russian, as a rule, is neutral – first of all, we see the willingness to convey facts. However, the same piece of news can be presented in Armenian in more detail than in Russian and English. News reports in Russian relating to business exhibitions, conferences, round tables and other meetings often reflect the opinions, speeches of selected speakers, but not all of them, therefore, it is necessary to contact several news agencies in order to form a holistic view of a particular event.

As a rule, news about the life of the Armenian diaspora in Russia, events dedicated to Armenian culture held in Russia (art exhibitions, film screenings, lectures, etc.) are presented on various information resources in Russia. But more detailed coverage by news agencies of Armenia in the news in Russian of Russian-Armenian relations and the results of cooperation between Russia and Armenia is needed.

Russian-Armenian Relations in the Context of Information Wars (A.B.Krylov)

The acute conflict with the collective West determines the information background in the international arena that is unfavorable for Russia. In Armenia, the situation is also complicated by the sharp confrontation between the current government and the opposition, who use the topic of Russian-Armenian relations for their own opportunistic purposes.

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opposition, that use the topic of Russian-Armenian relations for their own opportunistic purposes.

During the period of the third President of the Republic of Armenia S. Sargsyan (2008–2018), the information background was unfavorable for Russia. S. Sargsyan was not an opponent of Russia, but for ideological reasons, the information policy of emphasized distancing from Russia was designed to provide support for the collective West, plans to carry out constitutional reform and remain in power after the end of the second presidential term (5).

The change of power in Armenia in May 2018 further worsened the information background of Russian-Armenian relations. In most Russian media, the removal of S. Sargsyan was (and continues to be) assessed as another “color revolution” carried out in the interests of the United States. N. Pashinyan had a “pro-Western” reputation, but after coming to power, he announced his intention to maintain allied relations with Russia. Some of his actions in the international arena directly contradicted the policy of the “collective West” (support for Russia’s position at the sessions of the UN General Assembly and its policy in Syria, recognition of the election results in the Republic of Belarus in 2020) (4).

Initially, the course towards developing relations with Russia was positively assessed by the media supporting the Prime Minister (TV channels Public Television of Armenia, New Armenia, Haykakan Zhamanak, etc.), as well as by many media that could be classified as neutral (Shant TV channels, AR, newspapers Aravot, Arka, Armenpress, Arminfo, De Facto, Novosti-Armenia, etc.)¹. As a result, the information background in Armenia after N. Pashinyan came to power became more favorable for the development of bilateral relations. The situation changed after the 44-day war in 2020, after which most of the media associated with the government tried to shift the blame for the military defeat and the current problems of Armenia from their own leadership to Russia and the CSTO (6).

After the change of power in Armenia in 2018, most of the information resources ended up in the hands of the opposition, and this had a great impact on the coverage of Russian-Armenian relations. Now S. Sargsyan continues to control most of the Armenian media (TV channels Armenia, ATV, ARMNEWS, information resources of the Republican Party of Armenia, etc.). Another large segment of the Armenian media is controlled by the former President R. Kocharyan (TV channels TV 5, Second Armenian TV channel, Yerkir Media, Kenton; newspapers and Internet publications Hayots Ashkhar, Golos Armenii, Grapank, 168 Zham, 7OR.AM, Armenia Today, Lragir, Panorama, etc.). Some of the media had an openly anti-Russian orientation, the most illustrative example here is the Lragir². However, most of the pro-Kocharyan media covered the topic of Russian-Armenian relations in a more neutral spirit than in an anti-Russian one³.

¹ The media field of Armenian-Russian relations at the stage of recovery. 04.09.2020. Available from: <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/09/04/informpole-armyano-rossiyskih-otnosheniy-na-etape-ozdorovleniya-intervyu> Checked 30.01.2023.

² Who is behind the anti-Russian propaganda “Lragir.am” and what does Pashinyan and the Soros Foundation have to do with it? 26.03.2021. Available from: <https://verelq.am/ru/node/83864> Checked 30.01.2023.

³ The information field of Armenian-Russian relations at the stage of recovery. 04.09.2020.

In the situation of an acute conflict with N. Pashinyan, the media controlled by the former presidents sharply criticize his policies and are not interested in highlighting positive trends in Armenian-Russian relations. As a result, now most of the Armenian media deliberately hush up the positive aspects of bilateral relations or present them in a negative way (4).

The Russian media is dominated by materials with a negative assessment of the policy of the government of N. Pashinyan (4). At the same time, speeches by well-known Russian media figures of Armenian origin are being replicated in Russia and Armenia with calls for Pashinyan to resign, for the people and the army to overthrow the “rogue”, etc. (4). This causes a negative reaction in the Armenian society, makes it possible for Russia’s opponents to speculate on the topic of the Kremlin’s “information war” against N. Pashinyan, the “anti-Armenian and pro-Turkish nature” of the policy of the Russian Federation⁴.

On the attitude of Armenians towards Russia from the point of view of public opinion (G.A.Poghosyan)

For three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the people of Armenia and the political leadership of the republic have shown devotion to traditional friendly relations with the Russian Federation. Armenia was one of the first to join the new post-Soviet entity – the CIS, and then, as part of the five former Soviet republics, became part of the CSTO, and then, in 2015, became a full member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Armenia, with its political course, strategic priorities and geopolitical orientation, considered a long-term partnership with the Russian Federation as obligatory for itself. Moreover, the vast majority of the Armenian people (about 75–80% according to various sociological surveys) have always treated Russia as a friendly country and Russians as a brotherly people (8, p.284). Russia is now home to the largest Armenian diaspora in the world, comparable in size to the population of Armenia itself (2:157).

Russia is Armenia’s largest economic partner. In the field of energy and security, it is Russia that is the only and reliable strategic ally of Armenia. In the cultural, historical and humanitarian spheres, traditional Armenian-Russian relations are unparalleled. In a word, despite the tragic collapse of the Soviet system, the Armenian people and the political elite of the country, until recently, fully and completely maintained close cooperation with Russia.

At the same time, Armenia, like many post-Soviet republics, sought to develop international relations with other countries, in particular with the European Union, the United States, China, etc. Cooperation between Armenia and Europe was especially developed when Russia itself showed an open interest in developing partnership relations with the EU and NATO. Until 2014, Armenia pursued a multidirectional foreign policy.

Available from: <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/09/04/informpole-armyano-rossiyskih-otnosheniy-na-etape-ozdorovleniya-intervyu> Checked 30.01.2023.

⁴ Putin was accused of playing a double game in the Karabakh conflict and betraying Armenia. 12.11.2020. Available from: <https://wek.ru/putina-obvinili-v-dvojnoj-igre-v-karabaxskom-konflikte-i-predatelstve-armenii> Checked 30.01.2023.

However, the deterioration of relations between Russia and the collective West, followed by open confrontation, made maneuvering between the two geopolitical centers problematic. Especially for Armenia, which has close ties with the huge Armenian diaspora all over the world, therefore maintaining friendly relations with Western countries is not only a geopolitical issue for it, but necessary to maintain ties with the Armenian diaspora. The movement towards a multipolar world order (about which so much is said) presupposes the development of precisely multidirectional international relations.

Sociological studies conducted in Armenia over 30 years testified to the presence in the public consciousness of several value constants that form the basis of national identity. Among these constants, one of the first places is occupied by the character and modality of relations with historical neighbors. Russia in this system of relations has always acted as a friendly country, a reliable strategic partner and a guarantor of security. Relations between the Armenian and Russian peoples have historically been completely trusting and friendly⁵.

Sociological surveys of public opinion give a clear picture of the attitude of the population towards its neighbors. Here are some survey results. So, in the research of the American organization IRI⁶ in 2021–2022 the vast majority of Armenians named Russia as the most important political partner (57%), economic partner (61%) and partner for Armenia's security (64%). In situation with the war in Ukraine, according to the same study (IRI, June 2022); the majority (68%) of those surveyed are against sanctions against Russia. Among older people and those living in rural areas, those who are against sanctions are even more numerous. The greatest responsibility for the war in Ukraine, according to respondents, lies with the United States (17%), all parties to the conflict (16%), V. Zelensky (14%), NATO (10%), President V. V. Putin (8%). We also present the results of a representative nationwide survey of 1500 respondents, conducted under our leadership by the Armenian Sociological Association in July–August 2022 in Armenia. To the question with which countries Armenia should maintain and deepen friendly and partnership relations, the following answers were received: with Russia (59.4%), with Iran (32.7%), with France (25.2%), with the USA (23.0%), with Georgia (14.3%), with China (13.4%), with Germany (6.6%), with the European Union (5.4%) and others – is perceived as a friendly country with which Armenia must maintain and develop its relations. In Armenia, only Turkey and Azerbaijan appear as enemy states in all public opinion polls. Thus, in the 2021 study, the absolute majority of the adult population of Armenia (80%–90%) indicated Turkey as the greatest threat, and 77% indicated Azerbaijan⁷.

It is impossible not to notice that in social networks and in some media, the anti-Russian discourse in Armenia has clearly intensified lately. Following the global trend to

blame Russia for everything, publications aimed at strengthening anti-Russian sentiments have also become more frequent in Armenia. Anti-Russian statements and accusations began to be thrown into the public discourse more often. For this, any event in the country is used for speculation against Russia. The close partnership relations between Russia and Turkey do not escape the zealous attention of the Armenians, and are used by our common adversaries to inflame the conflict in the Armenian-Russian relations. There is a risk of an increase in anti-Russian sentiment, since some local media do not miss the opportunity to spread compromising evidence and “black PR” against our strategic partner. There is a massive attack on public opinion; maximum attempts are being made to present Russia and its political leadership in an unseemly light. In a word, active work is underway to reformat the public consciousness of Armenians. Of course, in many ways it is artificial and not easy to implement, because the vast majority of Armenian society is traditionally positive towards Russia and Russians, and the rating of President V. Putin is consistently high in Armenia.

Results

Most of the Armenian society is traditionally positive towards Russia and the Russians. Now in Russia there is the largest Armenian diaspora, which is comparable to the population of the republic. Armenian labor migrants in Russia maintain close ties with relatives back home and regularly send substantial financial assistance to their families in Armenia. However, recently, following the global trend to blame Russia for everything, publications have also begun to appear in Armenia aimed at strengthening anti-Russian sentiments. Anti-Russian statements and accusations began to be thrown into the public discourse more often. The close partnership between Russia and Turkey does not escape the zealous attention of the Armenians and is used by our common adversaries to stir up tension in the Armenian-Russian relations. In social networks and in some media, anti-Russian discourse has recently been increasing. Some local media do not miss the opportunity to spread compromising information about our strategic partner. There is a massive attack on public opinion; attempts are being made to present Russia and its political leadership in an unseemly light. Active work is being carried out openly to reformat the public consciousness of Armenians. Social consciousness in the conditions of the apathy of the population and the helplessness of the political opposition can become a convenient environment for such a reformatting. It is noticeable that on the part of the Armenian authorities there is no fast counteraction to anti-Russian stuffing and various actions of pro-Western civil society. The unambiguously pro-Russian orientation is supported by the Armenian diaspora in Russia. But unlike the Armenian diaspora in the West, it is less organized, does not have solid funds and has no experience in political activity. Therefore, its influence on the civil society of Armenia is weakly felt and its voice in the political discourse of Armenia is almost not heard.

Armenia is characterized by the functioning of information and information-analytical agencies in several languages – in addition to the state Armenian, in Russian, English and other foreign languages. This is due to the openness of the country, the vast

⁵ “Armenia-Russia: friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance”. Available from: <https://armenpress.am/rus/news/1080146.html?fbclid=IwAR10ultlo7mRBpLpW78KPyM8KUH-DZe5t1UDLefKdr2fkeRjZJuH-JxEZKM>. Checked 30.01.2023.

⁶ www.iri.org Access to the information resource is restricted on the basis of Federal Law № 149-FZ of July 27, 2006 “On Information, Information Technologies and Information Protection”

⁷ www.iri.org Access to the information resource is restricted on the basis of Federal Law № 149-FZ of July 27, 2006 “On Information, Information Technologies and Information Protection”; Public Opinion Study on Corruption in Armenia; Public Opinion Study on Corruption in Armenia. Available from: <https://www.crrc.am> CRRCArmenia_Turkey_Public_Opinion_Survey_Eng_2015. Checked 30.01.2023.

Armenian diaspora in various countries of the world. The Russian-language news content of information and information-analytical agencies in Armenia traditionally occupies an important place in the news materials of the agencies, however, there is potential for more detailed coverage in Russian of events in various spheres of life in Armenia, the agenda of Russian-Armenian relations, the results of cooperation between Russia and Armenia, discussions on topical issues of Russian-Armenian relations.

Social consciousness in the conditions of the apathy of the population and the helplessness of the political opposition can become a convenient environment for reformatting. There is no active opposition from the Armenian authorities to anti-Russian stuffing and various actions of a pro-Western society. Unambiguously pro-Russian orientation is supported by the Armenian diaspora in Russia. But unlike the Armenian diaspora in the West, it is less organized, does not have solid funds and has no experience in political activity. Therefore, its influence on the civil society of Armenia is weakly and its voice in the political discourse of Armenia is not heard.

The information resources of the political forces advocating an alliance with Russia (the Reformist Party, the Constitutional Right Union party, the Strong Armenia with Russia for a New Union movement, etc.) have limited influence. Their financial capabilities are incomparable with the massive support that supporters of breaking off relations with Russia receive from the collective West. As a result, the media coverage of the topic of Russian-Armenian relations does not correspond to their allied character and becomes an obstacle to the development of bilateral relations.

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