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Communication Regime in Belarus: State, Challenges and Threats

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the results of the study of the information and communication sphere in the Republic of Belarus, the role, place and importance of national and foreign information and communication resources. The state, challenges and threats to the national security of the Republic, the tools for conducting the information war of the Western countries against the Belarusian state are considered. Examples of the information impact of opposition channels in Telegram, Twitter, You Tube on the authorities in Belarus with the aim of removing A.G. Lukashenko from the post of the President of the Republic are given. Comparisons were made between the effectiveness and popularity of state-owned media and foreign private information resources. Priority areas of the research are identified and presented, the results should be used to strengthen counteraction to information and psychological attacks against Russia and Belarus.

Keywords: country communication regimes, information and psychological impact, information space, national security

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Introduction

It is impossible to forget the two years ago events in the Republic of Belarus, which became the result of an acute political crisis. It was provoked by a number of leading Western countries on the model of the “color revolutions” that had been repeatedly stamped earlier in various parts of the world. Information and communication resources played the main role in organizing the coup aimed at forcibly changing the existing system in the country, separating Belarus from allied ties with Russia and including it in the orbit of influence of the West. They were intended to become an instrument of destructive influence on the mindset

of the country’s population. Lies, slander, fraud, falsification and provocations served as tools for information and psychological attacks to form an appropriate understanding of the events and processes taking place in the republic, both in the world and in Belarus itself. There is no doubt that from the point of view of international law, the deliberate deformation of the real picture of what is happening in the target countries for the organizers of the “Maidans”, as was the case in Belarus, means interference in the internal affairs of states and undermining their sovereignty.

It would be a mistake to believe that today the information attacks of the enemies of Belarus are weakened or a thing of the past. Today, the force of destabilizing information and psychological pressure on the population of the country not only remains, but becomes permanent, being updated with the latest information technologies.

The real basis for such actions is obvious: Belarus, as a reliable strategic ally of the Russian Federation, is under the constant attention of the West, dissatisfied with the Belarusian socio-political and economic reality, as well as the independent foreign policy of the state.

The emerging difficult situation in the Belarusian information and communication sphere and its permanent adverse socio-political impact have become an important permanent factor taken into account in the state’s activities to ensure national security. This gives this area a special significance and actualizes the need for its comprehensive in-depth study, both in academic and practical terms. This is the aim of this article.

Since the methodology for conducting subversive information operations against Belarus is fully used by Western “partners” and in the Russian Federation, the past and present situation, processes and atmosphere in the Belarusian information and communication environment deserve close attention in order to learn lessons, the results of which can be taken into account and used to improve ensuring information and national security of the Russian Federation. This is especially important in the context of the ongoing Special Military Operation in Ukraine, which is characterized not only by the armed confrontation between Russia and the consolidated West, which intends to destroy our country, but also by an unprecedented information and psychological struggle that has acquired the features of an independent front.

Materials and Methods

The author used the methodology and concepts for studying communication regimes, developed by the scientists of the National Research Institute for the Communications Development (hereinafter referred to as NIIRK) and presented in scientific publications (3, 4, 5, 6, 7). The empirical base of the study was: legal acts of the Republic of Belarus, a report to the Security Council of the Russian Federation in November 2019, current practices of

communication participants, materials from print and electronic media, news agencies of the Republic of Belarus, Russian media, and statistical data. Both the works of Russian and Belarusian scientists were analyzed (2, 9, 12, 10, 13, 14).

Results

Currently, Belarus has a developed national information space¹, having specific features and objectively entering the global information space.

Today, the information space of the republic consists of: print media, news agencies, electronic media, television, radio broadcasting and media publishing forums.

Print mass-media. According to the Ministry of Communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus, more than 700 newspapers, about 300 magazines, 33 bulletins and catalogs, 2 almanacs are now published in the republic. These publications have different forms of ownership.

Print media are published mainly in Belarusian and Russian. The most influential are the newspapers “SB. Belarus today” and “Respublika”. Popular media also include the Russian newspapers Komsomolskaya Pravda and Arguments and Facts.

In total, more than 4 thousand foreign print media from Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia are distributed in the country. In addition, 37 online publications are registered, 7 of which are private.

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Information agencies. Currently, there are 9 news agencies accredited in the country, five of them are private. The largest state news agency is the Belarusian Telegraph Agency (BelTA), which has a correspondent network in all regions of the republic. This agency serves as the main source of official information and news of the country and the world. BelTA publishes up to 250 information materials online on its own Internet portal every day.

In Minsk, along with Belarusian news agencies, there are also representative offices of the Russian news agencies TASS and Prime, as well as correspondents of the world's leading agencies Reuters, Associated Press and Sinhua.

Electronic media. Belarus broadcasts 131 radio programs and 96 TV programs. Of these, 27 radio programs and 53 TV programs are private. A significant number of radio programs is explained by the fact that most of them are regional radio, the founders of which are local authorities.

¹ A generally accepted scientific definition of the concept of “national information space” has not yet been developed. Most researchers understand by this term the totality of national information resources and the information structure of the country, as well as foreign media represented in the media space of the state.

About 30 radio stations broadcast in the FM band, including Radio-FM, Radio Unistar (Belarusian-German project), Europe Plus and others.

For a foreign audience interested in events in Belarus, the programs of the radio station “Belarus” are designed, conducted in Belarusian, Russian, English, German, Polish, French and Chinese.

Television. In the Republic of Belarus there are national channels “Belarus 1”, “Belarus 2” (youth), “Belarus 3” (socio-cultural), “Belarus 5” (sports), “National Television” (ONT), “Capital Television” (STV).

Since September 2015, the regional TV channel “Belarus 4” has been launched, which serves as a platform for all regions of the country.

The first and only international satellite channel in Belarus is “Belarus 24”, which began broadcasting in 2005 (then it was called “Belarus TV”). Today, the channel operates 24 hours a day for 270 million viewers in 100 countries. The content is based on news and analytics about the most important events in the country and the world, interesting TV projects and high-quality films. Many programs are about the Belarusian Republic, primarily about its history, culture, main attractions, tourist destinations, Belarusian cuisine, famous brands and prominent people.

“Belarus 24” can be watched by viewers in Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and North America. Broadcasting is carried out in Belarusian and Russian. An online broadcast is organized for Internet users.

More than 200 foreign TV channels are rebroadcast on the territory of Belarus.

Since 2015, the country has made a complete transition from analogue to digital television broadcasting, which is available to almost 100% of the population of Belarus.

Media and publishing forums. These include:

- International specialized exhibition “CMI y Belarus”;
- Belarusian International Media Forum “Partnership for the Future”;
- Forum of young journalists;
- Minsk International Book Fair.

The legal basis for the activities of the media in Belarus is:

- The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus;
- Law of the Republic of Belarus “On information, informatization and protection of information” dated November 10, 2008 № 453-Z (with amendments and additions);
- Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Telecommunications” dated July 19, 2005 № 45-3;
- Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Postal Communication” dated December 15, 2003 № 258-Z;
- Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Media” dated 06.08.2008 № 2/1524 (as amended and supplemented);
- Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus “On measures to improve the use of the national segment of the Internet” dated February 1, 2010 № 60;
- Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus “On the public administration body in the field of digital development and informatization issues” dated 07.04.2022 № 136;

- Decree of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus "On some issues of the Ministry of Communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus" dated 31.07.2006 № 979;

- Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus "On approval of the Regulations on the Ministry of Communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus and amendments to some resolutions of the Government of the Republic of Belarus" dated March 17, 2004 № 302;

- Resolution of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus "On the Concept of Information Security of the Republic of Belarus" dated March 18, 2019 № 1;

- Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus, "On the State Program "Digital Development of Belarus for 2021-2025" dated 02.02.2021 № 66.

The Republican body for the state regulation and management of activities in the field of communications and informatization is the Ministry of Communications and Informatization of the Republic of Belarus.

The main tasks of the Ministry are:

- development and implementation of a unified state policy in the field of communications and informatization and creation of conditions for the development of structures of all forms of ownership operating in the information field;

- development and implementation of programs for the development of communications and informatization in the Republic of Belarus;

- coordination of activities of legal entities, regardless of ownership, and individual entrepreneurs in the field of communications and informatization in order to meet the needs of state bodies, legal entities and individuals in communications services and obtaining information, creating conditions for this through the development of information systems and (or) networks that ensure the formation and processing of information resources and the provision of documentary information to users;

- formation and implementation of policy in the field of planning, distribution and efficient use of the radio frequency spectrum of civilian radio electronic equipment.

The main goals of the Ministry of Communications and Informatization are:

- creating favorable conditions for the functioning and development of the country's communication regime, maintaining an atmosphere of partnership between participants in information and communication activities based on respect for the principles and traditions of the functioning of the mass media in the Republic of Belarus;

- formation of the national identity of the Belarusian people, the formation of patriotism, devotion to the fatherland and pride in their homeland, popularization of the national idea and humanistic goals of the state, assistance in strengthening its internal stability, the mood of society for creative activity in their country;

- development of equal mutually beneficial interstate relations with other countries in the national interests of the Republic of Belarus in the field of economy, politics, diplomacy, science, culture and sports based on pragmatism, respect for the independence and sovereignty of states, strengthening allied relations with the Russian Federation and constructive interaction with states in the CSTO and SCO;

- countering external destructive information and psychological impact on the population of Belarus, violation of international law and national legislation, the emergence and development of negative moods of certain categories of the country's inhabitants;

- organization of conferences, seminars, "round tables" and other public events involving a wide range of foreign participants in the interests of developing the communication regime in the country and fruitful interaction with the communication regimes of other states;

- creating a positive image of the Republic of Belarus in the eyes of the world community as a peace-loving state, sincerely striving to develop good-neighborly, equal, mutually beneficial relations with other countries and strengthen common European security

The Belarusian communication regime functions on the basis of the principles developed by theory (3, 4, 6, 7) and confirmed by practice (2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16):

- legitimacy (media functions in accordance with Belarusian legislation and taking into account the norms of international law);

- planning (consistency, purposefulness and logical sequence of disseminated information, relevant and at the same time designed for the future with foresight of the future);

- tolerance for different views and opinions about ongoing events and processes at home and in the world;

- timely dissemination of versatile information;

- adaptability (immediate adequate response to events in the information space and the situation in the country or on the international arena in order to change the emphasis in accordance with the ongoing events and, if necessary, topics in outreach activities);

- efficiency (selection of information in order to meet the needs of users and achieve a positive synergistic socio-political impact on the audience at home and abroad);

- objectivity (accurate unbiased presentation of facts, events, phenomena, trends and processes in the country and on the world stage);

- continuity (uninterrupted dissemination of information in any conditions and situations in the country and the world);

- competence (involvement in the work in the information and communication sphere of specialists with professional competencies for working in the media field, knowledge of the essence and specifics of the functioning of country and international communications, having broad erudition and horizons, capable of independent continuous education and improving their professional level);

- responsibility (discipline control of information and communication workers, personal responsibility for the quality of their work, truthful presentation of information).

In addition to the principles that are the basis for the functioning of the information and communication system, the communication regime of the Republic of Belarus, as a set of factors that determine the activities of a number of state and non-governmental structures, national and foreign mass media involved in the information and humanitarian space, has its own characteristic features and features unique to that state. They determine the content of the disseminated information and its tone.

The first thing that has the greatest influence on the formation of the communication regime is the Treaty on the Establishment of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, which entered into force on January 20, 2000. According to this agreement, Belarus has a special status of relations with the Russian Federation. This status, in addition to synchronizing policy in international affairs, maintaining close relations in the economic and military spheres, as well as in the field of education, science and culture, implies the coordination of actions in information policy. It is aimed, among other things, at developing a favorable communication regime designed to strengthen Belarusian-Russian interethnic and interfaith relations, intercultural and interregional interaction, as well as international communications.

During the period of the Russia Special Military Operation, the awareness of the common threat to their national security by both allied states certainly contributed to the further deepening of the integration of the two fraternal peoples.

The second feature that determines the communication regime of Belarus is the geopolitical position of the country as a central European state bordering four countries hostile to the Russian Federation, three of which are members of NATO, and with regard to the fourth, Russia is conducting a Special Military Operation for demilitarization and denazification of the political regime established there. This geographical position of the country creates additional difficulties for the Belarusian leadership in pursuing foreign and domestic policy.

The third feature that determines the content and essence of the communication regime in Belarus is associated with the emergence of the Eastern Partnership program. In accordance with this program, the leading Western European states, in coordination of their plans with the United States, or rather under their control, are pursuing a consistent policy of drawing the Eastern European post-Soviet republics into the orbit of their influence. The events in Belarus in the summer-autumn of 2020 were evidence of the implementation of such plans. It is also obvious that the opponents of Belarus, as a state allied with Russia, intend to intensify political, economic, ideological and psychological pressure against the republic in order to break the resistance of the Belarusian authorities to the West, include the country in their sphere of influence, push it onto the "Ukrainian trajectory" of development and thus create another advantageous springboard for a possible armed invasion of the territory of the Russian Federation. Such insidious calculations categorically contradict the national interests of both the country and the Belarusian people.

The fourth feature is connected with the shortage in the republic of a number of the most important natural resources, primarily fuel and energy, necessary for the normal functioning of the economy, the military-industrial complex and the social sphere. This entails an objective dependence of the country on imports; the severity of the problem is solved mainly through supplies from Russia.

The fifth feature, which determines the content and essence of the communication regime in Belarus, is generated by the specific socio-political formation existing in the country, combining the features of state capitalism with market methods of management and elements of socialist orders in social life. The obvious inconsistency of these two components

entails ideological dissonance in the information and communication space, encourages the formation and development of disparate positions and diverging interests in society.

And finally, one cannot ignore the "multi-vector policy" proclaimed by the leadership of the Belarusian state, which in a certain period led to "specific relations" with Western "partners" and distancing from the Russian Federation. Such a policy opened the doors to the republic for foreign "well-wishers" not only with business projects, but also with ideas alien to the Belarusian people and pseudo-universal values. The consequence of such a policy, among other things, was a significant increase in business and other ties of Belarusian citizens with the West, where they found themselves under the close tutelage of dubious organizations and special services. After returning to their homeland, a large part of them were saturated with the spirit, as it seemed to them, of "western paradise". Recently, due to sanctions imposed on Belarus, as well as adjustments by the country's foreign policy course, contacts with the West have decreased and most of the former "partners" have turned away from the republic, but their media (and not only) influence on the situation in Belarus, on the creation of an appropriate social political climate remain high.

Over time, and especially with the accumulation of experience in effective hostile actions during the period of destabilization of the situation in the country after the last presidential elections, stable semantic blocks began to form in the media space of the West, which today are widely used to have a destructive impact on the Belarusian society. They can be formulated as follows:

- saturation of broad sections of the country's population with tendentious, pseudo-truthful information designed to deform the prevailing worldview in society, transform traditional national values in favor of outwardly attractive, and in fact demagogic Western-style democratic postulates, the formation of public opinion that is in conflict with official ideological guidelines and government propaganda;
- increase in the number of citizens who are dissatisfied and critical of the Belarusian authorities and encourage them to mass manifestations and rallies in violation of the existing rules for their holding, to protest unauthorized actions and antisocial behavior with an increase in aggressiveness and manifestation of force in accordance with the proposed scenarios;
- building up, uniting and consolidating anti-government opposition forces, attracting new supporters and sympathizers to them, nominating and popularizing representatives of the radical opposition, instilling in protesters the need to overthrow the "last European dictator" Lukashenko and replace him with a hyped opposition leader and his team, allegedly able to lead the country to prosperity and well-being of citizens;
- organizing, synchronizing and coordinating anti-Belarusian propaganda campaigns in the West, actions of disobedience of the country's inhabitants to the legitimate demands of employees of allegedly anti-people law enforcement agencies, dissemination of laconic, effectively formulated anti-government slogans and political demands;
- conviction of the Belarusian public that only the West understands and shares the aspirations of the citizens of Belarus, supports its "fair" political demands, approves the choice of European civilization and the desire for genuine democracy and freedom, as if infringed by the authoritarian regime;

● political, economic, ideological and psychological pressure on the leadership of the republic.

An analysis of materials on the actions of Belarus' opponents in the information and communication space allows us to conclude that these intentions predetermined the setting by the West of long-term information and psychological tasks, the most aggressive of which are the following:

- discrediting and destruction of traditional national and ideological values, denial of the socio-economic, technological, scientific and cultural achievements of the country, a positive assessment of its past, the formation of dissatisfaction with the existing socio-political order in the country;
- compromising state institutions, provoking a "crisis of confidence" in the political leadership of the country and personally in the president of the republic, A. G. Lukashenko;
- exclusion from the information space of the country of state nationally oriented information and communication resources that form patriotic public opinion and self-identification of the Belarusian people;
- formation of protest online communities and involvement of individual bloggers in the dissemination of deliberately distorted or false information;
- the creation of alternative "democratic" public authorities, consisting of representatives of the irreconcilable anti-regime opposition;
- diverting public attention to secondary socio-political topics that are beneficial for the organizers of the "color revolution";
- Support for Western-oriented Belarusian journalists who annually receive millions of dollars from USAID, NED, the European Commission and the European Union;
- holding courses and seminars for the pro-Western indoctrination of Belarusian media workers and bloggers, organizing stationary ideological training of journalists in the interests of the West (in Minsk, in accordance with the German-Belarusian project, the International Educational Center named after Johannes Rau operates).

A special place in the hostile anti-Belarusian propaganda of the West is occupied by NGOs. This was clearly stated by the Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation S. E. Naryshkin. According to him, the United States "played a key role in preparing anti-government protests in Belarus, although in public space Washington is trying to keep a low profile". According to S. E. Naryshkin,

In 2019 and early 2020, the United States, through non-governmental organizations, allocated about \$20 million to organize anti-government protests [...] These funds were used to form a network of "independent bloggers" and information accounts on social networks, and to train activists to hold street actions. The most promising of them were trained abroad, in particular, in Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, where they were trained by experienced American instructors².

² The head of the SVR accused the United States of preparing protests in Belarus. Available from: <https://tass.ru/politika/9471673>

In total, over the period from 2008 to 2019, Western countries, according to their own data, spent \$128 million to finance the programs of "democratization" of the Republic³.

A very significant contribution to the formation and incitement of protest sentiments in Belarusian society is made by non-profit organizations engaged by the West, funded through a chain of intermediaries by the USAID agency⁴. Among the mediators, the most famous are the International Republican Institute (IRI) of John McCain, the Eurasia Foundation (EF) of A. Aslund the former adviser to E. Gaidar, the Open Community Institute of J. Soros. Their cooperation with Belarusian recipients is based on a scheme similar to the Ukrainian "domaidan" scheme of influencing public sentiment.

Since pro-Western non-profit organizations are deprived of the opportunity to carry out extensive work on the territory of Belarus, and many of them are banned by the authorities, a number of organizations are based in Lithuania. Among them, the most prominent role is played by the European Humanities University, which trains new personnel for the Belarusian opposition. However, some pro-Western think tanks, such as the Foundation. L. Sapegi and Belarus Security Blog (BSBlog) continue to disseminate "objective" information on Belarusian territory⁵.

Belarusian non-profit organizations specializing mainly in anti-government information activities include the Internet portal of the Belarusian opposition "Charter-97", the newspapers "Narodnaya Volya" and "Belorussky Partizan", radio station "Radio Racyja", as well as the TV channel Belsat TV, which have mixed Polish-American funding⁶.

In general, the effectiveness of Western and national pro-Western non-profit organizations in Belarus are relatively low, but their influence on the formation of oppositional moods in society cannot be underestimated. Thus, it has been noted that de facto it, in a number of cases, is reflected in some political attitudes of the ruling Belarusian circles, which periodically intercept the slogans of their political opponents on the "national question" and Russian-Belarusian relations⁷.

The long-term subversive role of a considerable number of non-profit organizations has prompted the Belarusian leadership to start drafting a law on foreign agents, according to which it is supposed to consider as foreign agents organizations funded by the West and engaged in political activities and propaganda of ideas that are contrary to Belarusian law.

The following actively participate in the organization and implementation of information and psychological attacks against Belarus: dissident Belarusian network communities, some of which were created in advance and were in "conservation" until the "X" hour; protest groups from among the inhabitants of the country, embedded in national social networks and the local blogosphere; engaged non-profit organizations and foundations financed from abroad; foreign and national "independent" mass media;

³ Available from: <https://jamestown.org/program/the-growing-importance-of-belarus-on-natos-baltic-flank/>

⁴ USAID projects in the Republic of Belarus. Available from: <https://www.usaid.gov/belarus>

⁵ Belarus Security Blog. Available from: <https://bsblog.info>

⁶ Report to the Security Council of the Russian Federation in November 2019. Available from: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru>

⁷ Ibid.

editorial offices of Belarusian opposition websites in Poland and the Czech Republic; foreign “free” radio stations, primarily CNN (USA) and BBC (UK), as well as the Belarusian office of Radio Svoboda, located in Prague, where Belarusian oppositionists find a source of income, a platform for self-organization, an opportunity for one’s own presentation and spreading their views (15).

Since the virtual audience in the world has grown dramatically, for information and psychological intervention in Belarus, the Internet and social networks are actively used, which have been turned into a platform for organizing and accompanying protests in the country. With the spread of mobile Internet and Wi-Fi, the number of users of the messenger program has increased for exchanging messages in various formats (text, sound signals, video, photos, graphics) in real time between groups of oppositionists and all users who thus find themselves in the sphere of targeted negative information.

On the Internet, the number of users of which in Belarus with a population of 9 million has reached 12 million (individuals and legal entities), under the pretext of the diversity of opinions and pluralism of assessments of socio-political world events that are mandatory for democratic states, materials of terrorist and extremist organizations are posted, appeals to protests against local authorities, riots and resistance to law enforcement agencies. Social networks popularize a criminal lifestyle, the consumption of narcotic and psychotropic substances, cultivate violence, money-grubbing, sexual promiscuity, gender-based molestation and legal nihilism, impose a distorted view of historical facts and events taking place in Belarus and Russia, discredit national heroes and, conversely, criminals are heroized. The main object of such information and psychological attacks is young people, who are more prone to manipulation due to insufficient life experience, unstable worldview and susceptibility to quick external spectacular radical decisions and ill-considered actions. At the same time, the processing of the youth audience is pursued by a secret plan – “cultivating a new generation of experts and analysts, including influencers, who would defend the positions of Western countries, explain to the population their advantages, and give forecasts favorable to the West” (15)

The anonymity of materials distributed on the Internet, which is ensured by the use of special information and communication technologies, contributes to the violation of the order and traditions that exist in the country’s communication regime. For the unhindered and safe promotion of their information and propaganda, special software has been developed in the United States that makes it possible to turn oppositionists and cyber activists into “invisible” for the country’s law enforcement agencies seeking to identify them (1).

According to a number of Russian researchers, today the Internet is a key element in the mobilization of protests of citizens in any country, which largely determines their ideological content, time frame and organizational capabilities (11).

The telegram channel NEXTA (from the Belarusian word “nekhta” – in Russian someone) is positioning itself as the mouthpiece of the opposition movement in Belarus, created in 2018 on the basis of You Tube. The most famous publication of this news service was the publication of pseudo-sensational materials about the facts of corruption in Belarus

and the demonstration of the widely advertised documentary film “Lukashenko: Criminal Materials”, which the official Belarusian authorities qualified as extremist. According to the Ukrainian branch of the corporation BBC, the film was watched by about three million people⁸.

After the presidential elections in Belarus and the protests that began, NEXTA, in addition to its information function, moved into the role of a permanent coordinator of the opposition movement. Calls for financial assistance to protesters regularly appear on the channel, the coordinates of the deployment of police units in the settlements of the republic are posted, personal data on employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs are disclosed (more than one thousand such messages were published until September 2020), instructions for organizing protest actions are set out, appeals appear to attack police officers⁹.

At the end of August 2020, NEXTA unveiled the “Strategy” of the protest movement in Belarus with the pretentious name “Victory Plan”. The key provisions of the “Strategy” are

the removal of A. G. Lukashenko from the post of the President of the Republic, the holding of new presidential elections, the release of all political prisoners, the prosecution of intelligence officers involved in the abuse of their official position when detaining protesters during demonstrations¹⁰.

Within a few days of the August 2020 events in Belarus, the popularity of the telegram channel increased rapidly and by September the number of its subscribers reached 2.5 million, and 530 thousand views occurred on You Tube. NEXTA releases several thousand messages per hour and has become one of the six most popular telegram channels in the world, becoming at the same time the world’s largest Russian-speaking foreign telegram channel¹¹.

The founders of the channel claim that its activities are financed exclusively by funds from advertising and donations from individuals. In fact, there is a lot of evidence that the secret sponsors of NEXTA are foreign human rights and pro-government, especially Polish and Lithuanian organizations, as well as Western intelligence services, as was stated by the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation S.E.Naryshkin¹².

To maintain uninterrupted communication between the organizers and activists of the protests, Western experts have developed a function on the Twitter platform that allows messages to be transmitted via the local mobile network in case the Internet is

8 What is Belarusian Telegram Channal NEXTA. Available from: <https://jamestown.org/program>

9 Available from: https://t.me/nexa_tv/3851. 8 апреля 2022 года (The Supreme Court of Belarus recognized the Nexta, Nexta Live and Luxta telegram channels as a “terrorist organization” and banned their activities in the country)..

10 Available from: https://t.me/nexa_tv/3852 (The Supreme Court of Belarus recognized the Nexta, Nexta Live and Luxta telegram channels as a “terrorist organization” and banned their activities in the country).

11 Telegram Analitics.tdstat.com

12 The head of the SVR accused the United States of preparing protests in Belarus. Available from: <https://tass.ru/politika/9471673>

blocked in the country. “Anti-virus” programs have also been created, which are supplied to participants in protest actions, making it possible to convey specially prepared information to addressees.

In order to ensure the personal safety of pro-Western oppositionists, special mobile technologies are used that allow them to be warned of danger by pressing one button (1).

It must be admitted that the propaganda onslaught of the consolidated West on Belarus, which has been massively carried out for a long time, has led to undesirable and very disturbing consequences. They were reflected in the strengthening of nationalist tendencies among the Belarusian intelligentsia, creating the prerequisites for the adoption of the liberal ideas of European and American pseudo-well-wishers, pushing “progressive-minded” people to democratic reforms along the lines of the West.

The openness of the information space of Belarus contributed to the success of the perception of false information, since in every modern democratic state, in the conditions of scientific and technological progress, there are no interstate borders for world information flows that are widely and freely distributed in the global information network. The pervasive ability of any information is explained by the lack of highly effective mechanisms for effectively counteracting external information expansion and the technical literacy of the country’s population, which overwhelmingly owns the latest computer technology and has appropriate mobile devices.

Considering the current information and communication situation in the Republic of Belarus, we have to admit that state-owned media are inferior in popularity to Western media and private information resources, which are often critical of the current government. The national media and local network communities pay insufficient attention to the patriotic part of the Belarusian population and supporters of the incumbent president of the country (there are a majority in Belarus), as well as their actions during the past acute political crisis and in the subsequent period. At the same time, the country information space is still filled with constantly imposed and systematically updated negative information about the situation in the country, its order and the President of the Republic A.G.Lukashenko, about the alleged harmfulness of Belarus maintaining political, economic and military relations with the Russian Federation and, all the more, their strengthening, entailing the international isolation of the state and increased sanctions pressure on it.

This can be explained by the fact that the Belarusian authorities pay more attention to the development of the technical side of the media, and less to the ideological and patriotic education of society.

It would be unfair to believe that the Republic of Belarus has not taken measures, including regulatory ones, to protect the country’s information space from external harmful effects. Thus, the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Media” as amended in 2018 provided:

- obligatory registration in Belarus of foreign media distributing their products in Belarus with a change in form or content;

- obtaining permission to distribute foreign media products on the territory of Belarus without changing the form and content (including rebroadcasting of foreign TV channels in cable networks);

- a ban on financing the media from foreign sources (with the exception of cases where they participate in the statutory fund of the editorial office with a share of foreign investment up to 20%)¹³.

Violation of the law entails criminal, administrative, civil and other liability.

It is important to note that the weakening of the “security belt” along the perimeter of the borders of the Russian Federation due to the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, which has become an existential clash between our country and the collective West, sharply raises the question of the socio-political situation in the Republic of Belarus and its prospect, under the influence of opposing some national and foreign information and communication resources. And not only its future as a sovereign subject of international law, but also the prospects for allied relations with Russia, the fate of multilateral multidisciplinary cooperation in the CSTO and SCO formats depend on how the country withstands the test that has fallen on it.

Conclusions

The analysis of materials on the role, place and significance of national and foreign information and communication resources of Belarus provides a basis for identifying priority areas of scientific research, the results of which can be used to strengthen the counteraction to information and psychological attacks by the enemies of Russia and the Republic of Belarus and can contribute to enhancing national security. These areas include:

- identification and study of information and communication structures and associations (subjects of communication) operating abroad and on the territory of Russia and Belarus to the detriment of their national interests;

- identification of the formation mechanism, the functioning of elements of country communication regimes unfriendly to Russia and Belarus, the establishment of organizers, sponsors, patrons, active performers of hostile information and psychological actions; revealing the true intentions of the enemies of our countries for use in propaganda work, debunking the image of Western opponents for our peoples;

- determination of types, essential features, forms and methods, technical and technological characteristics, scale of activity and geography of the impact of communication tools used for destructive information and psychological processing of the population of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus;

- development and implementation of a technology for continuous monitoring of information flows in the communication space of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus in order to identify publications dangerous for the national interests of our countries and neutralize them online;

¹³ Identification of the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Media” dated 06.08.2008 №. 2/1524 (with amendments and additions).

- identification of political, economic, military, social, cultural and other objects (areas) within the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus that are of great interest to our ill-wishers, the development of effective measures designed to reduce the vulnerability of Russian and Belarusian virtual audiences from the negative impact of hostile propaganda; assessment of the likely degree of destructive impact; determining the possibility of effective neutralization of hostile propaganda;

- development of a model of the world communication order based on the formation of an optimal international legal framework for the civilized regulation of country communication regimes at the global and regional levels in the interests of developing good-neighbourly international relations and maintaining a system of equal security for all states

Of course, these areas of scientific research do not cover the whole range of problems of paramount importance for the study of the communication regime of the Republic of Belarus, however, in our opinion, they can be considered as proposals for a full-scale scientific development of the phenomenon under consideration.

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