

# Russian Federation and Uzbekistan: Russian Identity and Attitude to Russians

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**Abstract.** The article presents the results of a study of the communication regime of the Republic of Uzbekistan in relation to the Russian Federation, in the context of modern changes in the world order. Despite the global challenges, the Republic of Uzbekistan is strengthening its close and friendly relations with the Russian Federation. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty underlines the importance of strengthening cooperation between the two countries. The analysis of the communication regime covers both official resources and the media, while revealing a positive trend in communications with Russia. Russian identity and the degree of positivity of communication in relation to the Russian language and Russian identity in Uzbekistan are considered in the article. The Russian language is preserved, and the Russian identity is encouraged and supported. The Republic supports friendly and positive communication with respect to Russia, Russians, Russian language and Russian identity, even in the face of global changes. Uzbekistan continues to strengthen relations with Russia on the basis of mutual respect, partnership and common historical memory, which remains important in the modern geopolitical reality.

**Keywords:** communications, political communications, communication regime, Uzbekistan, friendliness, content analysis

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## Introduction

For more than a year now, we have been observing a transformation of the world order, past international conflicts are escalating and new ones are flaring up. Undoubtedly, these transformations for our country and our foreign policy partners are connected with

political events in Ukraine, which upended the structure of the world. The international community can hardly say what awaits us in the future. In these conditions, Russia's foreign policy ties with its closest partners also undergo a "strength test": the world community demands that countries take sides and express their position through political manipulation and with the aim of imposing sanctions or other "punitive" measures from the West or "unfriendly countries." But we should not forget about friendly ones, because many of our partners, despite such turbulence, remain reliable allies and even strengthen existing ties. Global political upheavals will someday end, and building respectful, trusting relationships anew will take more than one generation.

The concept of friendliness includes many aspects of relations between states, ranging from official diplomatic gestures to the attitude of the population towards the residents of another country. An important issue in political science and international relations was the study of this topic. Alfred Wolfers, author of "Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics" [9] discussed the concepts of cooperation and conflict in the context of world politics, Joseph Nye studied "soft power" [8], Robert Keohane explored the theory of cooperation and conflict [7]. They have made significant contributions to our understanding of friendly relations between states. Undoubtedly, communication is the basis for building any connections at all levels, and this article proposes to consider friendliness through the prism of communications.

Full-fledged studies of this issue began to appear only a few years ago. In the article "Communication regimes as a factor in cross-country interactions: problem statement" by V.I. Gasumyanov, V.V. Komleva [1], the concept of a communication regime appeared, the concept of a communication regime is given as a controlled (with varying degrees of controllability) system of formal and informal norms, rules, traditions, actors and tools that ensure communication in a certain space. Communication regimes are typologized, including by the degree of their friendliness, and the communication regimes of Central Asia are studied [2]. The authors of the concept, on the basis of the National Research Institute for the Communication Development, conduct annual monitoring of the friendliness of countries in the post-Soviet space, including the Republic of Uzbekistan [3].

The Republic of Uzbekistan has historically been one of the key partners of the Russian Federation in Central Asia; now, as in the past, it is building close, warm and mutually beneficial relations with our country. New forms of interaction are being created, new agreements are being signed and meetings are being held at all levels. Not long ago, a Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement was signed between our countries and a large-scale SCO summit was held in Samarkand, as a result of which a large number of documents were signed. These events laid a solid foundation for further interaction in the fields of economics, culture, and social cooperation and in the military sphere.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the level of friendliness of the communication regime of the Republic of Uzbekistan: the attitude towards Russia, Russians, the Russian language and Russian identity, the position of government bodies and the tone of materials

in the popular media of Uzbekistan are examined. This study will help to better understand the position towards Russia and will allow you to build competent communication strategies for interaction with one of the key partners in the post-Soviet space – the Republic of Uzbekistan, and will contribute to the development of the scientific field of communication regimes.

## Materials and methods

Content analysis is a research method designed to analyze text, graphic and audiovisual data in order to identify patterns and trends in information. In this area, the works of Bernard Berelson, who specializes in the analysis of mass communication and the impact of the media on public opinion, are important [5]; Harold Lasswell, a pioneer in political communication who studied the speeches of political leaders [4]; and Herbert Bloomer, one of the founders of symbolic interaction, who studied symbols in society [6].

In this work, content analysis is used to analyze materials from government websites of the Republic of Uzbekistan – the official websites of the President<sup>1</sup>, the Government<sup>2</sup> and Oliy Mazhilis<sup>3</sup>. Publications in electronic news of the Republic of Uzbekistan from January 2022 to the present day were considered.

More than 1,500 materials from government websites were analyzed, of which 200 materials were selected that directly mentioned Russia, Russians, ethnic Russians, the Russian language and identity, as well as indirectly – interstate associations with the participation of Russia: the CIS, SCO, BRICS. With the help of the coding developed by the author, a content analysis of these materials was carried out regarding friendliness towards Russia.

The Uzbek media were analyzed using keywords: Russia, Russian Federation, Russians, Russian language, Russians. For a more objective picture, the pro-state media *uzdaily.uz* and *gazeta.uz*, and *uzmetronom.agency* и *Fergana.media* which are clearly oppositional<sup>4</sup>, their content analysis was carried out using similar coding.

## Results

To conduct a content analysis of materials from official government websites and electronic publications of the Republic of Uzbekistan, a coding system was developed, which involves analysis in three groups: attitude towards Russia, attitude towards Russians and

<sup>1</sup> The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Website of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan: website. Available from:

<sup>2</sup> The Government portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Available from: <https://www.gov.uz/>.

<sup>3</sup> The Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majilis of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Available from: <https://parliament.gov.uz/>

<sup>4</sup> Opposition websites have been unblocked in Uzbekistan. RIA Novosti: website. Available from: <https://ria.ru/20131027/972929347.html>

attitude towards the Russian language and Russian identity. Within each group, materials of a negative and positive nature were identified, as well as neutral comments that contain references to Russia, Russians and the Russian language, but are not positively or negatively colored.

**Table 1.** Developed by the author the coding system for the evaluation of materials

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Attitude towards Russia	Positive materials mentioning cooperation, partnership, development, friendship and joint agreements.	Materials without a clear positive or negative position toward the Russian Federation, just mentions.	Negatively colored statements questioning partnership, friendship and cooperation with the Russian Federation.
Attitude towards Russians	Positive assessments of Russians and ethnic Russians living in Uzbekistan, friendship, partnership, etc.	Neutral references to Russians and Russians, without specific attitude.	Bad attitude towards Russians, ethnic Russians, criticism, condemnation.
Attitudes towards Russian identity and language	Support and promotion of Russian language and identity, honoring ethnic Russians, positive evaluations.	Mentions and other neutral materials.	Bans, sanctions and other repressive actions against Russian language and identity.

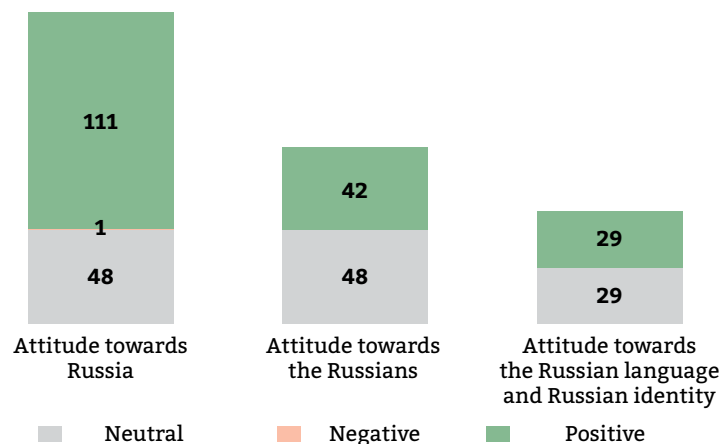
Source: Developed by the author Coding of materials

### Analysis of official government resources

Based on the developed methodology, the official resources of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the government and the Oliy Majilis were analyzed. The nature of the broadcast communication is clearly positive – more than 90% of references to Russia, Russians, the Russian language and identity have a positive connotation. In the context of attitudes towards the Russian Federation and Russians, the words and phrases friendship, cooperation, development, partnership, joint projects are more often mentioned. Applicable to the Russian language and identity, words of gratitude are heard, awards are given to ethnic Russians and specialists promoting the Russian language, including teachers.

Only one negative material was noticed – the website of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan posted the President's speech "Shavkat Mirziyoyev: achieving independence was not easy"<sup>5</sup>, dedicated to the 31st anniversary of the independence of Uzbekistan, which contains a quote from the speech of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, delivered on the "Shahidlar Khotirasi" alley:

<sup>5</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev: It was not easy to achieve independence. Website of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Available from: <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/5478>

**Figure 1.** Content analysis of official resources of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Source: Compiled by the author, based on the collected data

It's not for nothing that we come here every time and honor their memory. Achieving independence was not easy. Although independence was achieved 31 years ago, our grandfathers tried to do it more than 100 years ago. 100 thousand of our compatriots were repressed, 13 thousand were mercilessly shot. Why? Because they were our greatest heroes, treasures of the nation. They knew 2–3 languages. The regime had an understanding that they were capable of liberating our Motherland and leading it to prosperity. In this place, it seems as if their voices can be heard.

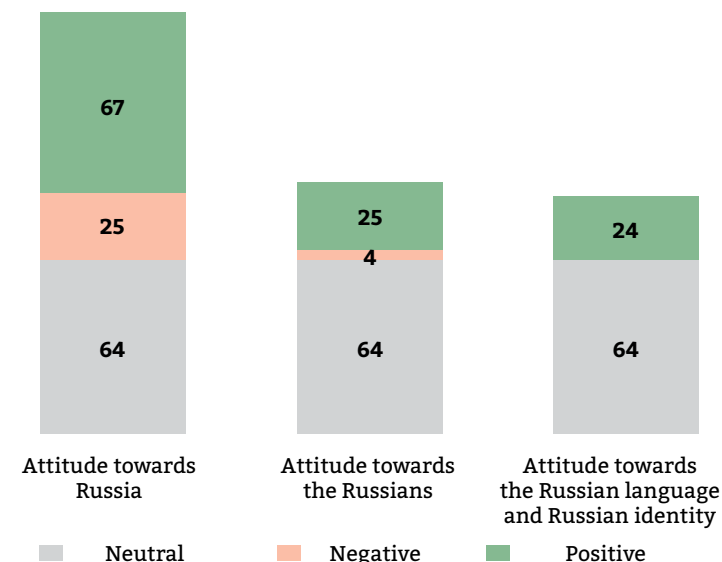
This speech caused a resonance in the Russian media<sup>6</sup> and the State Duma of the Russian Federation<sup>7</sup> and was interpreted as an indictment of the Soviet regime for the repression of ethnic Uzbeks. However, immediately there were clarifications and comments from officials of the Republic of Uzbekistan that the president's words were interpreted incorrectly by the Russian side. There are no negative materials addressed to Russians, the Russian language and Russian identity at all.

### Media analysis

The study was conducted on the basis of four popular electronic resources of the Republic of Uzbekistan: *uzdaily.uz*, *gazeta.uz*, *uzmetronom.agency*, *Fergana.media*. 204 materials were selected using the keywords: Russia, Russian Federation, Russians, Russian

<sup>6</sup> The President of Uzbekistan accused the USSR of destroying the "heritage of the nation". RBC: website. Available from: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/31/08/2022/630f598f9a79475dbf57d55d>

<sup>7</sup> Russia responded to Mirziyoyev's words about the destruction of the color of the Uzbek nation in the USSR. Lenta.ru: сайт. Available from: <https://lenta.ru/news/2022/08/31/zatulin/>

**Figure 2.** Content analysis of electronic media of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Source: Compiled by the author, based on the collected data.

language. As can be seen in Diagram 2, negatively colored materials make up a small part – 14%, while more than half (57%) give a positive assessment of Russia, Russians, the Russian language and Russian identity. Negatively colored materials often refer to Russia rather than to Russians and are generally not found in relation to the Russian language and identity. Most of the negative assessments are broadcast by state-oriented media, while opposition resources more often evaluate Russia, Russians, the Russian language and identity positively.

Gazeta.uz gave the most negative ratings, at the beginning of the Special military operation in Ukraine published many negative publications, such as "Russia has launched an invasion of Ukraine"<sup>8</sup>, "Results of the first day of the war between Russia and Ukraine. The Main News"<sup>9</sup>, "I always said that I don't want to go anywhere. Citizens of Russia - about relocation to Uzbekistan"<sup>10</sup>. It is noteworthy that now the website has changed its position: now the first two publications have been removed from the site, and interviews

<sup>8</sup> Russia has launched an invasion of Ukraine. Gazeta.uz : website. Available from: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/02/24/war-ukraine/>

<sup>9</sup> The results of the first day of the war between Russia and Ukraine. The Main News. Gazeta.uz: website. Available from: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/02/25/war-first-day/>

<sup>10</sup> I've always said that I don't want to go anywhere. Russian citizens about relocation to Uzbekistan. Gazeta.uz: website. Available from: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/03/12/relocation/>

with relocants are positive in nature and a separate news block is dedicated to them<sup>11</sup>. Opposition publications *uzmetronom.agency* and *Fergana.media* are more critical of the Republic of Uzbekistan and more often support the Russian Federation, including on issues of conducting a Special Military Operation in Ukraine.

## Conclusion

Only some of the materials reflecting the attitude of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Russia, Russians, Russian language and identity were analyzed; publications in Uzbek and other languages other than Russian were not considered. However, these data also allow us to draw a conclusion about the nature of the communication regime: positive materials predominate both in the media and on the official resources of the Republic of Uzbekistan. There are negative assessments of Russia, and less often of Russians; completely negative assessments of the Russian language and Russian identity have not been found.

Publications on the websites of the government, president and parliament, compared to media materials, are more restrained, which is typical of official resources; they often talk about cooperation, partnership, friendship and joint projects, and the Declaration on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Uzbekistan signed in 2022<sup>12</sup> only confirms the friendly character of relations and communications of Uzbekistan. A positive attitude is also conveyed towards the interstate integration associations of the SCO, BRICS, CIS and EAEU, and words about friendship, cooperation and partnership are heard. Russia has been and remains one of the key partners of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the potential of this mutually beneficial friendship has yet to be realized. On official resources, Russians are mentioned in the context of friendship and partnership, implemented projects in the field of private business and culture are noted, and new platforms for intercultural exchange and communications are created. All such events are accompanied by positive comments about friendship and common historical memory.

The Russian language as the language of intercultural communication is developing in every possible way: new textbooks are published, awards are given to Russian language teachers, competitions are held and joint projects are being implemented to develop the Russian language with educational institutions of the Russian Federation. Ethnic Russians are not subject to any oppression, the communication of officials is imbued with the spirit of friendship between peoples and a common past. Russian identity is not prohibited, but encouraged. Thus, a decree was issued on the creation of the School of Sports Excellence by Oksana Chusovitina, an ethnic Russian athlete competing for Uzbekistan, and the achievements of Uzbek ethnic

<sup>11</sup> "Everyone here calls me brother." Relocants about the first month in Uzbekistan. *Gazeta.uz*: website. Available from: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/04/25/relocants-3/>

<sup>12</sup> Declaration on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Official network resources of the President of Russia: website. Available from: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/5839>

Russian athletes are celebrated<sup>13</sup>. The Republic of Uzbekistan actively supports the dialogue between two cultures and promotes friendship between peoples in Uzbekistan.

Uzbek media, especially pro-state ones, more often publish publications critical of Russia. They are related to criticism of the Special military operation in Ukraine and cooperation in integration associations, such as the recently announced triple gas alliance project<sup>14</sup>. Pro-state media see in this Russia's imperial ambitions and an encroachment on the independence of Uzbekistan. However, the share of such critical publications is not large; they mainly cover joint agreements and successful projects. Media considered to be oppositional do not print negative materials at all; they invite Russian experts for interviews and publish comments from Russian scientists.

Critical materials are related to the consequences of the Special military operation for the global economy; Uzbekistan has to accept the new reality without the ability to influence global processes. In general, materials devoted to Russians and Russians are mostly positive; articles are published about the friendship of peoples, relocants and their adaptation in a new country, cultural projects of the two countries to maintain friendship and common historical memory.

Both official resources and the media of the Republic of Uzbekistan broadcast a friendly, positive attitude towards Russia, Russians, the Russian language and Russian identity, even in the conditions of political turbulence in recent years. Uzbekistan has been and remains a reliable partner and ally, and it is important to continue to build relationships on mutual respect, partnership and the common historical memory of the two peoples.

The conducted research can form the basis for more detailed studies of the communication regime of both the Republic of Uzbekistan and other countries in the post-Soviet space. Often, the communication processes taking place there have similar specifics due to historical features. This research can help develop and implement effective communication strategies for interaction between the Russian Federation and neighboring countries in general and the Republic of Uzbekistan in particular. Such scientific works reflect the position of Russian researchers, the transmission of which to our partners is also part of the communication emanating from the Russian Federation.

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