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The communication mode of Belarus: stability and formation factors

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Abstract. The article presents the materials of a scientific discussion held by the National Research Institute of Communications Development in April 2021. As the result of discussion the controllability assessment was carried out and the type of the communication mode of Belarus was determined. Geographical, historical, and geopolitical factors forming the Belarusian communication mode are analyzed from a historical point of view and in their current state. The evolution of communication mode was carried out under the influence of two multidirectional trends: the development of a system of vertical communications, typical for countries with an institutional matrix where redistributive institutions dominate, and horizontal communication systems, which is typical for countries with market-dominated institutions. As the result we see the formation of two cores in the communication mode. A number of participants of the discussion believe that one of the cores of the communication mode (connected with the Catholic Church) makes it impossible to build a rigid hierarchical communication model in Belarus, absolutely controlled by the authorities.

Keywords: communication mode, manageability, political management, political stability, Belarus, social system, institutional matrix, redistributive institutions, market institutions

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Introduction

The difficult period of geopolitical instability actualized the problem of socio-political stability, the effectiveness of public communications, channels of communication and information, the friendliness of interactions between countries, which led to an increasing interest in the study of communication regimes. The communication regimes of countries that combine “cultural traditions, legal norms, situational circumstances, the interests of decision-making centers and centers of influence and communication activity of non-state actors”(5) are becoming the subject of close scientific attention and the object of technological influence. Significant actors of country communication regimes include: political power, civil institutions, media, church, army, security structures, and business structures. The control centers of communication regimes, as a rule, are concentrated in the institutions of power. Despite the structural similarity of the communication regimes of different countries, they have functional and content uniqueness.

One of the countries of the post-Soviet space, attracting the attention of many political scientists, sociologists, historians, is Belarus. According to research conducted by NIIRK, the Belarusian communication regime is distinguished by a high level of state control over communications, weak openness of channels and filters of political mobility, channels and filters of entry into the control center, development and decision-making

regarding the norms and rules of socio-political communication in the country. This article is a presentation of the main results of the study of the controllability of the communication modes in Belarus and the position of Russian and Belarusian experts invited for scientific discussion.

Materials and methods

The research is based on systemic and neo-institutional approaches, according to which the development of a social system is ensured by a complex structure of institutions that structure social action and understand the “rules of the game” [6]. In this structure, it is possible to identify the basic institutions that form the institutional matrix. The features of its formation and evolution determine the essential features of the country’s communication regime. The authors used the methods of content analysis, event analysis, expert interviews, sociological surveys, and the method of retrospective analysis. The empirical base of the study was the normative legal documents of the Republic of Belarus, statements of officials, media materials, new media, information and analytical centers materials, specific practices for implementing the decisions made.

Results and discussion

Controllability of the Communication Mode of the Republic of Belarus (V.V.Komleva)

The study of communication modes began in 2020, when NIIRK posed the problem, introduced the concept of “communication mode” into scientific circulation, developed a methodology for scientific understanding of this phenomenon and a methodology for its empirical study. Our focus is primarily on the countries of the post-Soviet space. In 2021, we conducted a comparative study of the friendliness of communication modes and published the first rating of countries compiled by the degree of their friendliness towards Russia. Belarus shared the first place with Kazakhstan. The study of friendliness and the compilation of the rating is planned to be carried out annually. In 2022, we began comparative studies of the manageability of country communication regimes.

Let me remind you that we consider the communication mode as a controlled (to varying degrees), institutionalized (to varying degrees) system of norms, rules, principles, customs, traditions, structures, actors that regulate information and communication processes. Mode regulation concerns two immanent components of the communication mode: information (messages, information transmitted in the process are regulated); communication (the process and channels for establishing bilateral or multilateral contacts are regulated - the result of communication is controlled). Both, information and communication create an information space. That is the purpose of the communication mode.

The communication mode of each country has a control center that develops rules and regulations. The communication regime of each country has a control center that develops rules and regulations. Usually, they are legally fixed by the institutions of power and are formed in accordance with the ideas of the authorities about the desired public discourse, ways of interacting with society and their ideas about the models of information channels (mass media, new media, etc.). Today we see that these ideas about the “correct” communication mode are determined by the national interests of countries, national security considerations (in particular, information security) and the desire to ensure information sovereignty.

The communication system is influenced not only by the laws adopted by the authorities, but also by informal practices that have historically emerged and are fixed as quite effective norms of communication. We are talking about customs, traditions, stereotypes, historically established socio-cultural institutions (for example, elders, clans, tribes). In a number of countries, they have a significant impact both on those who legally establish the rules of communication and on those who must comply with them, they are legally fixed by the institutions of power and are formed in accordance with the ideas of the authorities about the desired public discourse, ways of interacting with society and their ideas about the models of information channels (mass media, new media, etc.). Today we see that these ideas about the “correct” communication mode are determined by the national interests of countries, national security considerations (in particular, information security) and the desire to ensure information sovereignty.

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In our study, we analyzed two characteristics of communication modes: controllability and friendliness. Materials on friendliness were published by us earlier (3). I will focus on the study of controllability.

Controllability of the Communication Mode of Belarus

Considering that controllability is society’s agreement with the measure of control and restrictions that the control center imposes on public communications, the author’s methodology was based on three important parameters:

1. location of the communication mode control center (domestic or international);
2. the degree of conventionality of the control center of the communication mode;
3. assessment of manageability indicators, the main criteria of which are:
 - 3.1. the ability of communication mode control centers to transfer it from one state to another without conflict;
 - 3.2. the ability to achieve controlled parameters of the communication mode;

3.3. the ability to use the mechanisms of self-organization and self-reflection of control objects to regulate communication modes.

From January 2021 to January 2022, a study of the above parameters of the controllability of the communication mode in the Republic of Belarus was conducted.

Criterion 1. Location (inside the country or outside the country) of the decision-making and control of the communication mode center.

The control center is inside the country. The main actors in this center are the President of the Republic and State institutions, whose functions include regulation, support, control, sanctions for deviations in the field of communication. In fact, legislative, executive, judicial and law enforcement authorities are involved here.

Since 2018, there has been an activation of alternative communication mode control centers in Belarus. The key technologies of their work concerned socialization and the formation of civic networks. As a rule, these centers were located outside the country, but based on non-profit organizations and projects (education, media, leadership, human rights, etc.) within the country. These projects and non-profit organizations developed in Belarus with the support of foreign investors and technologists. In 2020, they made an unsuccessful attempt to take over the management of communications within the country. Currently, such attempts at communication influence are being made by the opposition located abroad.

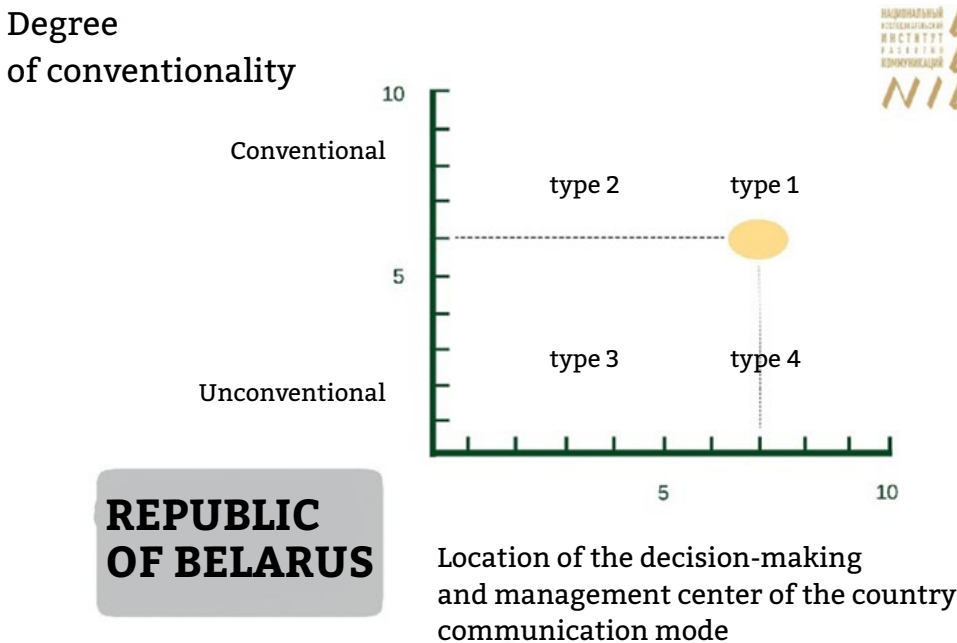
It should be noted that, taking into account the integration ties within the Union State and the CIS, the communication mode control center in Belarus sometimes adjusts its information agenda in the context of the Russian one. Socio-political discourse and media content can also be adjusted (including through the dissemination of information by Russian media and new media). Nevertheless, the issues of the rules and norms of the country communication mode are regulated by the Belarusian authorities independently, as well as bear independent responsibility for the effectiveness of these norms and rules. Belarus is guided by the principles of information sovereignty and the goals of national security. From a scientific point of view, the interpretation of the Belarusian communication mode can be defined in terms of political realism. It is obvious that Belarus "defends its own national interests in the information sphere using all available forces and means"¹.

Criterion 2. The degree of conventionality of the decision-making and control of the communication mode center.

After the presidential elections in Belarus, part of the population had doubts about the reliability of the results, and alternative channels of information support these doubts to this day. Decisions that tighten the norms and rules of communication cause controversy. According to the results of the expert assessment, the degree of conventionality of the communication mode in Belarus was rated 6 (out of 10 possible), and by the location of the decision-making and management center 7 (out of 10 possible). The type of communication mode in Belarus is characterized as conventional with an internal control center and is shown in Figure 1.

¹ The concept of Information Security of the Republic of Belarus. Approved by the Resolution of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus, dated March 18, 2019. No. 1.

Fig. 1. The type of communication mode of Belarus according to the level of controllability and conventionality



Criterion 3. The assessment of manageability indicators is disclosed by three sub-criteria.

3.1. Manageability criterion: the ability of communication mode control centers to transfer it from one state to another without conflict.

The Belarusian case of 2020–2021 demonstrates the controllability of the country's communication regime through the conscious updating of the norms and rules of socio-political communication by government institutions. As a result, the communication mode remained under the control of the conventional control center – the current government. Although the contradictions that arose during the socio-political conflict of August 2020 pushed for such changes.

Legally, the guarantor of freedom of speech and information in Belarus is the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus. According to Article 33 of the Constitution, “monopolization of mass media by the state, public associations or individual citizens, as well as censorship is not allowed.” The main law that controls and regulates the media in Belarus is the law “On the Mass Media” dated July 17, 2008 N.427–3. In May 2021, amendments to this law were adopted. In particular, the legal mechanisms of control over the media, Internet resources, foreign founders of the media, editors-in-chief of the media, companies conducting a public opinion poll on socio-political topics have been strengthened; restrictions have been introduced on propaganda of extremist activity, calls for it; and other information, the dissemination of which can harm national interests.

In May 2021, amendments were also made to the law on mass events, which strengthened control over events and the responsibility of their organizers. In particular, instead of a notification procedure, a permissive procedure for holding mass events has been introduced. In accordance with Art.8 of the Law on Mass Events “until obtaining permission to hold a mass event, its organizer (organizers), as well as other organizations and citizens, are prohibited from publicly calling for the organization and holding of a mass event, including announcing in the media, the global computer network Internet or other information networks about the date, place and time of its holding, to produce and distribute leaflets, posters and other materials for this purpose”². A ban has been introduced on coverage in the media, the Internet or other information networks in real time of mass events held in violation of the established procedure for organizing or holding them, in order to popularize or promote them. In carrying out their activities, journalists are prohibited from acting as organizers or participants in mass events.

Thus, we see that the control center of the communication mode of Belarus is capable and has the ability to relatively conflict-free transfer the mode from one state to another. Active changes take place after August 2020. The change in the goals of the communication mode and the modernization of the tools to achieve them were to a greater extent forced and associated with attempts at socio-political destabilization. But subsequent decisions and actions show that the management center was able to analyze the problems and make a number of important decisions: 1) to create conditions for increasing information sovereignty; 2) to strengthen control over the content of information circulating in the information field; 3) to strengthen the requirements and control over the activities of media institutions and non-profit organizations; 4) to create new institutions of interaction between government and society.

3.2. Controllability criterion: the ability to achieve the target and controlled parameters of the communication mode.

In cybernetics, where the term “controllability” was introduced, controllability is closely related to the ability of a system to achieve controlled. We are talking about a wide range of parameters set by the communication mode of a particular country.

Judging by the statements of the President of Belarus, the adopted strategic documents and regulatory legal acts, the key target parameters of the communication regime of Belarus are:

1) the creation of institutions for effective communications with the authorities (feedback systems and interactions) for a better understanding of public needs and sentiments, to increase the level of public trust and support those norms and rules of communication that the authorities establish. In other words, the task is to increase the conventionality.

2) achieving information sovereignty. Information sovereignty is understood as “the inalienable and exclusive possibility of law of the State to independently determine the rules for the possession, use and disposal of national information resources, to implement an

² On Changing the Law of the Republic of Belarus “On Mass Events in the Republic of Belarus”: Law of the Republic of Belarus dated May 24, 2021 No. 108-3. Available: <https://president.gov.by/ru/events/subpisan-zakon-o-massovyh-meropriyatiyah>.

independent foreign and domestic State information policy, to form a national information infrastructure, to ensure information security”³;

3) achieving information neutrality. The principle of information neutrality provides for “pursuing a peaceful foreign information policy, respecting the generally recognized and generally accepted rights of any state in this area, excluding interference in the information sphere of other countries to discredit or challenge their political, economic, social and spiritual standards and priorities, as well as causing harm information infrastructure of all states and participation in their information confrontation”⁴. At the same time, the Republic of Belarus defends its own national interests in the information sphere using all available forces and means.

The tools for achieving and controlling these parameters of controllability of the communication mode are, in fact, formulated in the Concept of Information Security of the Republic of Belarus. Chapters 7 and 8 of the Concept also clearly indicate the readiness of the control center for tough actions regarding external interference in the communication field of Belarus. It was noted that Belarus is pursuing a policy of information containment, which is expressed in “demonstrating a reliable readiness to repel destructive information impacts, a sufficient possibility of technological, organizational, legal counteraction to threats in the information sphere and identifying their sources”⁵.

Thus, the ability to achieve target and control indicators is above average (7 points out of 10). The control center itself recognizes that it is not possible to fully achieve the target indicators, therefore a number of changes to the legislation and strategic documents have been adopted.

3.3. Controllability indicator - the ability to use the mechanisms of self-organization of control objects to regulate communication modes.

In modern conditions of non-linearity, the growth of self-reflection of communication participants, it is increasingly difficult to maintain controllability of communication modes through control and subordination. The autonomy and self-organization of social subjects increasingly determines their reactions to the regulatory influences of power (up to confrontation). Therefore, it is advisable to use the creative energy of self-organization to form communication modes to involve self-organizing communication networks and information channels, especially the institution of citizen journalism, in communication with the authorities. State-civil partnerships are necessary for timely receipt of information through feedback from the authorities and society, for timely adjustment of decisions made and for increasing public support for the norms and rules of communication and the content of disseminated information.

Experts gave a low rating (4 out of 10) to the ability of the control center in Belarus to use the mechanisms of self-organization of control objects to regulate communication modes. The risk lies in the weak involvement of self-organizing communities in relations

3 The Concept of Information Security of the Republic of Belarus. Approved by the Resolution of the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus dated March 18, 2019. N.1.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

and system of communications with the authorities. A number of communities do not set such goals, they were originally created to change the parameters of the regime, and not to support it. They are blocked, restricted, prohibited. This is understandable and logical from the point of view of ensuring national security. But there are initially consciously and constructively minded self-organizing communities whose involvement in systemic relations with the authorities would be appropriate to ensure the controllability of the communication mode and social immunity against destabilizing influences.

Factors of influence on the formation of the Belarusian communication regime (P.A.Barakhvostov)

The Belarusian institutional matrix was formed and developed under the influence of both endogenous and exogenous factors. The flat nature of the territory, completely covered with forests and a network of rivers and reservoirs, a climate with a short warm period, the need to reclaim arable land from the forest were not favorable for the development of agriculture. Floods were a big problem, requiring work to prevent and eliminate their consequences. In addition, the Belarusian rivers were communication routes, played an important role in trade contacts (in particular, the well-known route "from the Varangians to the Greeks" ran here), which required security for their use.

The result of this and the "path dependence" effect was the formation and self-reproduction of the most important institutions of the redistributive type: a centralized power structure for managing agricultural and flood control work and a communitarian worldview. However, the density of the hydraulic society (the term was introduced by K.Wittfogel) in these lands was significantly lower than in the East, due to a less developed bureaucratic system due to the impulsive variant of collective work.

The geopolitical location of the Belarusian lands determined the "disturbing" neighborhood. Due to the capture of the mouth of the Western Dvina by the Livonian Order, and the southern trade routes by the Tatars for many decades, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (hereinafter GDL), which included the Belarusian lands, was cut off from both the West and the East. This forced self-isolation, supplemented by a poorly developed infrastructure, led to the fact that each of the regions in the GDL was an independent economic entity, and horizontal communication was built between the regions.

After the conclusion of the Union of Krewo between the GDL and the Kingdom of Poland, there was an active penetration of market institutions from the Polish institutional matrix. Among them are the institutions of subsidiarity, pluralism of opinions and ideologies introduced by the Catholic Church and merchant capital, the concept of freedom, the spread of Magdeburg Law, etc. The strengthening of market institutions contributed to the development of horizontal communication links. However, their alignment ran into active opposition from the magnates - the owners of large latifundia (later - ordinations, which were an analogue of Western European majors), who, on the one hand, were generated by market institutions that came from the West, on the other, they tried to build within their possessions and spread outwards a strictly hierarchical top-down management and communication system. Thus, the

evolution of the communication mode in the Belarusian lands since ancient times has been carried out in the face of opposition from two opposite trends: the development of a system of vertical communications, typical for countries with an institutional matrix dominated by redistributive institutions, and a system of horizontal communications, which is typical for countries with the dominance of market institutions in the institutional matrix.

Located on a civilizational fault formed when GDL became a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Belarus is now the subject of both two influences: the Western one with its open communication mode and the eastern one, which is characterized by more closed country communication modes. As a result of the diffusion of institutions in the Belarusian communication mode, not one, as usual, but two cores have been formed, connected with the Catholic and Orthodox churches, around which communication forces are grouped. Although they are not equivalent (15% of Catholics in the country), nevertheless, due to the peculiarities of the Catholic Church, its relative independence from the state, such a feature means that it is impossible to build a rigid hierarchical communication model in Belarus, absolutely controlled by the authorities, since a certain part of the population has the opportunity to receive information from alternative sources.

Thus, the Belarusian communication mode was formed and developed in the face of two opposing trends: the development of a system of vertical communications, typical of countries with an institutional matrix with dominating redistributive institutions, and horizontal communication systems, which is typical of countries with market institutions dominating in the institutional matrix. The result was the formation of two cores of the communication mode, one of which is connected with the Catholic Church that makes it impossible to build a rigid hierarchical communication model in Belarus, absolutely controlled by the authorities.

Communication of generations: research experience in Belarusian society (I.I.Kalacheva)

Generational communication is what determines the development of the communication environment from within the country. There is an opinion in the expert community that the new generations, who are active figures in the communication space and the information environment today, are insufficiently researched. Therefore, such an indicator as manageability, which is important in the study of communication strategies of any country, is difficult to study.

In the context of the rapid development of information technologies, there is a "reset" of values, the formation of new ideas about social institutions, the civil sector, education, mass media, etc. The continuity of generations as a principle of communication is subject to change.

Many researchers note that the main ways of transferring knowledge have changed: in the past, knowledge was transferred from seniors to juniors, but in modern conditions, knowledge is transferred from juniors to seniors. This also determines other aspects of relations between generations. The shift in continuity and in the performance of the

main function by the older generations in relation to the younger ones also influences the formation of the normative-value basis of communication.

In Belarus, this problem is very relevant. 2022 in the country has been declared the “Year of Historical Memory”, which is a significant event at the present stage of the development of the state. The Belarusian State University is conducting a study: “Historical memory in the system of basic values of the Belarusian people as a factor in intergenerational communication and information security” (supervisor I.I.Kalacheva). The purpose of the work is to study the problem in the context of modern communication processes, cultural and civilizational practices and new challenges in the information environment. The object are the representatives of the older and younger generations of the inhabitants of Belarus. The study is carried out within the framework of an interdisciplinary approach, using general scientific, historical, and sociological research methods. Empirical material allows to test the hypotheses put forward. For example, a group of researchers put forward a hypothesis – the assumption that the involvement of younger generations in Internet communication makes communication difficult and contributes to the creation of communication barriers with older generation. The respondents were representatives of different generations of the Belarusian society. This is the post-war generation (1943–1963); Soviet (1963–1983); perestroika generation (1983–2003); post-perestroika generation (2003–2023). Respondents – survey participants, representatives of different generations expressed their opinion on this issue. It was revealed that representatives of the older generations more confidently refer themselves to the Soviet people, the perestroika generation or the post-perestroika generation, and the younger generation associate themselves with the digital society, call themselves “electronic people”. However, respondents note that there are no fundamental changes in relations between generations “because of the Internet”. Relationships remain helpful, trusting, benevolent, open, although, of course, there are reasons for concern, especially in matters of raising children. The answer of Anna, 22 years old, can be indicative. Anna explains that it is the moral duty of a young man to provide all possible assistance to his parents, grandparents. Anna says:

Without them, my loved ones, I would not be able to build my life the way it is now. I love my relatives and cherish them, helping them is not something burdensome for me, on the contrary, I take care of my loved ones with pleasure and joy.

For the team of authors, the scale of the issue its significance for research and development of practical recommendations is important. The topic of historical memory is rather new for the Belarusian humanities. Therefore, researchers see great potential for its solution both at the theoretical and practical levels. Historical memory is creative if it is directed to the future. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the opinion of each person as a representative of a particular generation.

The work continues, and its results are being tested in student audiences, at scientific and practical conferences in Belarusian universities. In the near future, the report “Memorable places and historical memory and patriotic education of youth” will be presented.

The scientific journal “Modern Youth and Society” constantly publishes articles on this topic (editor-in-chief I.I.Kalacheva). For example, in issue 10 for 2022, the article by DrScs (Hist.) S.A.Pivovarchik “Historical and cultural heritage and commemorative practices

in the formation of the historical memory of youth” was published. The article discusses the experience of using the historical and cultural heritage of the Grodno region (Ponemanye) in the formation of the historical memory of students. The author comes to the conclusion that the most effective is the participation of young people in commemorative practices, which include educational excursions, the installation of commemorative signs, visits to thematic museums and exhibitions, participation in festivals, master classes and military historical reconstructions. The factors influencing the formation of historical memory are revealed: collectivity, emotionality, sacredness, focus on the past.

Discussion (N.M.Mezhevich)

It is difficult to assess which of the theoretical categories is more important: the political or communication mode. I think they overlap. It is clear that both are based on an economic, current political and historical basis. It is clear that such studies are very necessary, especially for the Republic of Belarus. Because now in the Republic sociology is poorly developed. But in this case, I would not criticize the research conducted by academic teams and authorities in the Republic. I would mention that the “sociology” that comes to the territory of the Republic of Belarus from abroad, primarily from Warsaw, is an outrage on theory, methodology, and practice. Therefore, of course, we need direct and indirect research methods that would allow us to get an idea of what is happening in the country.

Issues of communication between the political regime and the government should be in the spotlight. The communication mode and the political regime are not abstract academic categories, but a reflection of the situation in which the state, in this case, the Republic of Belarus, lives. This is a situation of enormous external pressure. And under these conditions, it becomes necessary to choose between the famous Chinese slogan “Let a hundred flowers bloom!” and harsh state security practices. Now priority is given to the security of the state and society. I think that this is actual: the actions taken by the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko have collected the results of the best practices, which, unfortunately, we will have to go through in our Russian Federation.

I would like to note that Belarus is on a civilizational frontier. Western influences have always been very strong. Moreover, one should not always treat them critically. I do not understand the position of many Russian experts who propose to almost exclude the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania from Belarusian history. Let’s throw out the Horde period from Russian history right away: from Kievan Rus immediately to Peter. Historical heritage is different, contradictory.

And here I, substantiating my thought, touch upon the issues of the Catholic faith. In the Republic, 8–11% of people profess a Catholic version of Christianity. As a person who worked for many years in the Republic of Poland and, accordingly, was in a Catholic environment, I can say: these are other Catholics. The attitude towards faith and religious morality is completely different than in Bavaria or Northern Italy. People sometimes come to the service, but life and the church go in parallel. What cannot be said about Poland. And I would not just take this factor into account, but revise it altogether. Communicating with

Belarusian Catholics, I also asked them about the perception of information from Poland, about their attitude towards the regime, about their knowledge of the Polish language. I do not claim to be a linguist, but the language used to the answers was not Polish. And the idea of dogmas was also imperfect. This is an intermediate option that can adapt to the classical Catholicism of Poland, if a person moves to Lublin, and to Smolensk Orthodoxy, and to Lviv Uniatism. But this is not the classical Catholic faith and, accordingly, the influence of religion on a person is completely different.

As for information flows, I have a feeling that, on the whole, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, and the vast majority of people who define their faith by their parents have a high level of trust in secular authorities. And the differences are not related to faith, but to other parameters. For example, in the cities, super-Orthodox people, as they believe, are much more likely to be in opposition to the regime. Catholics mostly live in the countryside. Therefore, there is much more reason to talk about loyalty (not support, since loyalty and support are different things) to the authorities, even with internal disagreements. The gulf is more often not between Catholics and Orthodox, but between people who moved from the countryside to the city in the first (sometimes in the second generation) and those who continue to live in the countryside. This is visible to the naked eye. And this must also be taken into account. There are well-known methods for conducting sociological surveys (how to do this, taking into account the level of urbanization) for this.

In connection with the events of 2020–2021, it should be noted that the opposition was supported by both representatives of the Orthodox and Catholics, and not supported by representatives of the Orthodox and Catholic hierarchies. Everything is very different. This is a choice that depends on specific people, and not on the fact that we have a priest in front of us. This is not a question of religious institutions, but a question of a common understanding of the situation in the country by every person, regardless of religious affiliation.

Discussion (S.G.Rogalsky)

It is important for me that the religious factor sounded bright and distinct in previous speeches; this is because without this it is impossible to characterize the situation in Belarus. Here, in Belarus, indeed, a lot is connected with a person's religious affiliation, despite the fact that according to sociology, the level of religiosity of Belarusians is still assessed as "moderate" (50–60% of the believing population). The confessional / religious affiliation to which a person refers himself is also important.

Statistically, 82% of Belarusians are Orthodox, 12% are Catholics, and the remaining 6% are of other religions. These are the people who identify themselves with one or another confession. At the same time, Catholics are usually second only to the Orthodox in terms of number and number. But at the same time, in terms of the number of registered communities in Belarus, Evangelical Christians are in second place (524 communities), that is, they have more communities than the Roman Catholic Church (499 communities). The Orthodox Church today has an absolute majority: 1,714 communities are registered in Belarus.

It should be emphasized that the concept of traditional confessions is enshrined in our Constitution. This is important, since the significance of the confession in Belarus is determined by the influence that it had on the historical, spiritual and cultural development of the Belarusian people. These faiths include Christianity, Judaism and Islam. This is an important factor that we must take into account when evaluating the influence of religion on the communication regime.

The second important aspect is ethno-confessional. There is a widespread opinion in society: if you are Orthodox, then you are Russian. And if you are a Catholic, then you are a Pole. This is a philistine approach, reflecting the trends that have taken shape in the Belarusian confessional community. I agree that Belarusian Catholics are not Polish Catholics. In general, religiosity in Belarus depends on the region. This became especially felt in the post-Soviet period, because the religiosity of Western and Southern Belarus (both Orthodox people and people of other faiths) is objectively higher than in the north and east of the country. This happened in the days of Soviet power, when there was an idea to make Belarus the first atheistic republic, to make a buffer between a very believing Poland and the USSR. And this reflected in the confessional character of our country.

In both denominations, Catholics and Orthodox, there were people who were “for” and “against” the current government. It cannot be said that all Catholics were “against”, all Orthodox were “for”: both there and there were people who held different political views, so I would like us not to make sweeping generalizations about which church supports what. Everything depends on the person, on his views, and not on the denomination to which he belongs. Although cultural and external factors have an impact on people.

The third important point concerns the media: state media (those controlled by the current government) and those who consider themselves independent. Today, modern means of communication have a great influence: instant messengers, channels, social networks. Especially among young people, and this is inevitable. The younger generation now categorically claims that television is already dead, and radio is also almost dead, so a person will draw all the necessary information from the Internet, from social networks and various channels. Another problem arises: the official media broadcast the official position of the state. Verification of other channels and information is difficult. Is the information staged or false? The first reaction of a person is always emotional, only after a while the person begins to think. Yes, it used to be clear several decades ago: what was printed in the newspaper or reported on TV was a fact. The alternative makes the situation blurry.

In Belarus, confessions do not have special media facilities, unlike in Russia (their own television, channels such as Spas). Nevertheless, we have bureaus that cooperate and broadcast these channels. They are popular and trusted among believers. The rest of the information channels mainly cover the life of denominations and churches in Belarus, they simply talk about certain events.

They continue the traditions: before the revolution, there were newspapers «Church Gazette» that recorded in great detail and accurately what was happening in the life of the church. Thanks to them, today we have a lot of information about how church life used to go. The current church media have inherited this tradition in the context of the general

life of the church. They talk about various doctrinal, moral and other aspects, that is, they establish a similar nature of communication.

Let's summarize. We recently had a conference with representatives of the Evangelical Church, colleagues spoke at our Christian Educational Center. We communicated, and it is very pleasant that despite the difficult modern life we had a dialogue. At the political level, even at the business level, dialogue is not working right now. But in the confessional sphere it still exists. In communication with our German colleagues, we saw that there really are people who understand that information about the current situation is given one-sidedly from both sides. They understand that they need to hear the position of the people who live here and who are also Christians. We got a detailed dialogue, where we spoke frankly about our worldview. Unfortunately, modern media do not don't deal with it. So communication at our level is now one of the most constructive. These are the confessional aspects in the implementation of communication.

Discussion (V.V. Vorotnikov)

Dear colleagues! Let me thank the organizers for an extremely interesting report and informative discussion. In continuation of the discussion about the relationship between the concepts of political and communication modes, I would like to emphasize their difference. If the political mode that is the process of exercising and redistributing power as a hierarchical phenomenon, then the communication mode reflects multidirectional interactions within society: power – society, society – power, horizontal connections within society. Thus, the communication mode is a more voluminous, systemic concept and, therefore, is more suitable for a comprehensive description of socio-political interactions in the state. On the one hand, the communication mode is a political and legal framework and a tool for regulating the processes of limiting, promoting or imposing (and in crisis conditions, propaganda) certain meanings, norms and principles. On the other hand, this is an important research category that allows one to analyze the role, place, nature and content of communication between different institutions and social groups.

Let's move on to the subject of discussion. My research and teaching specialization is the history of the Baltic States. Speaking of Lithuania before the 19th century, I inevitably touch upon the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth, and, consequently, the territories that are the part of modern Belarus. In Russian school and university textbooks (probably due to the Soviet heritage), the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, both before and even more so after the Union of Lublin, is still not covered. Several pages are devoted to it concerning a situation about the existence of an alternative center for collecting Russian lands in the Middle Ages and the reasons for its defeat in this struggle.

Indeed, in the Soviet years, in union center, the history of the national republics (the Baltic, and Belarus, Ukraine, etc.) was not studied - this was the sphere of interest of the regional academies of sciences. Accordingly, by the time of the collapse of the USSR, Moscow did not have not only historians, but also a systematic vision of the history of the states

that emerged in the post-Soviet space. This led not only to a research vacuum, but also to the fact that nationalist and anti-Russian narratives began to dominate national historical discourses. For example, scientific and educational literature, educational programs in Belarus in the 1990s began to be created in the spirit of the ideology of the Belarusian People's Republic, the Belarusian emigration and, unfortunately, even the Belarusian Central Rada.

The collapse of the USSR, the defeat of the ideological construct of Soviet internationalism returned many contradictions to the space of Central and Eastern Europe, including territorial and interethnic disputes. They are based, no doubt, on differences in historical memory, national historical narratives. Let me clarify: the formation of a national historical narrative is an objective phenomenon in the process of state formation and nation building. It becomes problematic only when it is based on a sharp, aggressive opposition to the national narratives of other countries (and, consequently, it's ideologization).

What are the starting points of the historical narrative of Belarus? How friendly is it towards Russia?

Common to the Polish, Lithuanian and Belarusian history is, for example, the Battle of Orsha in 1514, which is regarded as a historically significant victory in the confrontation with Moscow and the containment of its aggressive policy. Here is how its significance is characterized in the "History of the Belarusian statehood" recently prepared by the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Belarus:

The further advance of the Muscovites to the west was stopped thanks to the defeat of the Moscow army in the Battle of Orsha on September 8, 1514. This was an important achievement, which showed that the seizure of new lands for the Muscovites is fraught with significant difficulties. The position of the local population, which was more tightly integrated into the structures of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, also played a role in this [4].

This quote does not require special explanations.

I would like to give a number of examples from the field of so-called "banal nationalism" (that is a constant, everyday reminder of identity, for example, through the demonstration of state symbols, photographs of recognizable sights, natural landscapes, representatives of flora and fauna characteristic of a given country, and even simple writing or pronouncing the name of the country, etc.). Let's have a look at the banknotes of Belarus. For example, the Rumyantsev-Paskevich Palace, built in Gomel and associated with the period of the Russian Empire, is depicted on the Belarusian 20-ruble banknote, then the Nesvizh Castle, the residence of the Radziwills, is depicted on the 100-ruble banknote. Given the well-known role of this aristocratic family in the history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to any Belarusian schoolchild, such a hierarchy of the significance of these symbols reflected in the denominations of banknotes can be subconsciously interpreted in favor of the undoubted priority of the national, "regional" history.

One more example. If we analyze the postage stamps issued by Belarus, it is striking that the white-red-white color scheme, which has nationalist historical and political connotations, is regularly used both when displaying the denomination and when writing

the name of the country “Belarus”. The publication of postage stamps is an institutionally complex, multi-stage process that involves a significant number of officials, representatives of the scientific community and the interested public, which means that it reflects a public consensus. Of course, the use of an appropriate color scheme, directly associated with the heritage of the Belarusian National Rada, raise questions. I would also like to note the recently issued block and stamp dedicated to the “30th anniversary of the first Belarusian postage stamp”. It depicted the cross of Euphrosyne of Polotsk, symbolically significant for Belarusian nationalism; the same image naturally appeared on the 2022 issue as well.

In general, in the modern historical discourse of Belarus, both points of view on the development of the Belarusian statehood harmoniously coexist – as an independent Eastern European national project (regionalism) and as a part of a large Russian project (Western Russianism). For a frontier space that has repeatedly experienced influence from both the West and the East over the centuries, such balancing and eclecticism are quite natural. However, the question of the primacy of one or another narrative remains a matter of the political will of the elites. That is why the presence of the mentioned and similar semantic elements that have conflict potential and threaten the substantive, conceptual integrity of the integration project of Russia and Belarus requires constant attention from politicians, academic and expert communities of the two countries.

Discussion (A.G.Kachura)

Belarusian society at the present situation is much more complex than the communications that function in it. Unfortunately, we can state that there is a lack of communication editions, not only from a qualitative point of view, but also from a quantitative one. It is not in vain that the problem of Union media is raised in the programs of the Union State: we do not have enough opportunities to “deliver” our ideas to the audience. There are not enough children’s and youth editions, programs. Now our attention is focused on the means of communication, which have the ability to influence the audience quickly, and we practically do not work on the future.

If you look at the media market, then our ideological opponents have more media and channels. If you sum up all the United media, they do not cover a third of the audience that our opponents reach. Moreover, I would not like to use the concept of “independent media”, since after February 24 there were practically no independent media left. What is happening now in politics, economics, ideology and the information space is, on the one hand, a process of negativity that has been launched against Russia and its allies, and on the other hand, it is a complete absence of any rules and morality. Therefore, we are now no longer in a period of “turbulence”, but in the very center of the storm. We are now trying to find something to lean on and say: “Let’s now build a new relationship from scratch.” Unfortunately, this is not possible and finding support is becoming more and more difficult.

Another important aspect: the Russian language. The Russian language has become not just a communication tool, it has become a boundary along which there is a division

into “us” and “them”. We are now drawing conclusions about the social, cultural affiliation and way of thinking of a person, even his political affiliation by language. Our ideological opponents, when they work with a mass audience, switch to Russian. They don’t hesitate to use it against us. This is a paradox. Even in Latvia, people who were recently banned from getting a job without passing the Latvian language test (and migrants from Ukraine) are canceling the Latvian language test and are allowed to work and use the Russian language. When analyzing the content side of communication modes, it is important to take into account that language today is becoming the main marker of the specifics of the mode.

Another important note: in our time, almost all major media (classical, network, television) are not geo-referenced. They can collect their audience all over the world. This will increasingly characterize modern media and be increasingly manifested in communication modes, which will ultimately increase the importance of country communication modes in shaping the intercountry, regional (and possibly global) agenda.

Discussion (O.I.Lazorkina)

The cross-border nature of the communication mode in Belarus determines the specifics influence of external factors on its formation. This is also important for creating programs to improve the communication mode, taking into account internal and external processes. It is necessary to pay attention to the vulnerability of the Belarusian society, which for several centuries has been under the influence of external influences and has developed a certain level of information “immunity” and stress resistance. In this regard, it is important to combine the approaches and requests of the society itself for certain formats of interaction.

Obviously, this affects the interpretation of such categories as trust and social contract. In crisis conditions, traditional principles for measuring the level of trust do not fully reflect the mood of society. In a transboundary environment, such parameters as understanding the internal space of the country, the willingness to protect it and make it a priority in comparison with the need to change the social contract, have a significant impact.

Determining the specifics of the communication mode in Belarus, we can talk about the need to use a reduction analysis, which involves dividing the whole into its component parts and identifying the mood of a stress-resistant society.

Discussion (A.G.Stoppe)

I will start with the thesis which we have already heard today that in the Union State “there is no joint information space, but there is a common one.” If we turn to the Treaty on the Establishment of the Union State of December 8, 1999, then Article 18 states that the joint activities of the Union State and the participating states include the formation of a

common information space. At the same time, the Action Program for the implementation of this Treaty refers to the provision of a joint information space. Specific measures to solve these problems are determined by the Priority Directions of the Union State for 2018–2022, approved by the Supreme State Council of the Union State.

It's not about the terms, it's about the essence. The essence is that the common information space of Russia and Belarus as an equal and sovereign association of information spaces of the two states really exists. Its most important base is the socio-cultural community: the proximity of cultures and history, unity in the perception of the world, religion, and the education system. An important role is played by the mass media and information, the formation of a similar public opinion on political, economic and social issues. At the same time, taking into account the adoption of 28 Union state programmes that open a new historical stage in the economic integration of Belarus and Russia, it is necessary to accelerate work on the formation of a common information space while ensuring the security from external destructive influence in the context of a hybrid war launched by the collective West against our countries.

A frank and detailed discussion on further steps to develop a mutually complementary common communication space between Russia and Belarus took place in November 2021 as part of the Belarusian-Russian expert media forum "Union State: Information Space in the Digital Age". The Internet today has become as much an integral part of modern comfortable life as electricity and hot water, that was especially shown by the coronavirus pandemic. The accessibility of the Internet, the unprecedented growth of its audience, the demand for social networks define a new reality for traditional media in the information space. It must be taken into account that the Internet is increasingly beginning to resemble a "sticky web" due to fake and toxic content.

Modern information and disinformation are transboundary, therefore the creation of a common information field, no less than a defense or economic one, is of strategic and political importance for Russia and Belarus, for the Union State.

It was for these purposes that the State Secretary of the Union State D.F. Mezentsev proposed the creation of a media holding. It should provide objective, trustworthy and complementary information, cement a unite information space.

In the Union State there are common media – these are the newspapers "Soyuznoye Veche" and "Soyuz. Belarus–Russia", the journal "Union State", the portal of the Union State and the television and radio broadcasting organization of the Union State "BelRos". They have their pluses and minuses; a colossal data base has been accumulated – archival and informational.

The creation of a media holding will strengthen the advantages and get rid of many disadvantages, for example, bring the technological base to a new modern level. In addition, it must promote the theme of the union in the harsh conditions of the hybrid and information war.

At the same time, instead of an embellished, often boring, passive format for presenting information about the successes and problems of the union, an active, offensive position is needed, and not only about the Union States, but also about the Eurasian Economic Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Another thesis discussed today, on which I would like to focus attention, is the thesis about “the continued simplicity of management in an increasingly complex society”, which allegedly leads to a loss in the effectiveness of this management.

I cannot agree with this approach. For example, a symphony orchestra – what could be more difficult in terms of polyphony, settings, consistency of musicians? And the conductor comes out – only with a simple stick – and music sounds with a lot of themes, accents, acupunctures. This means that the point is not in the simplicity of management, but in its efficiency, professionalism, mutual understanding and trust. In order to achieve this, we need to have, among other things, communication links that unite society, government, and the state into a single organism.

There is no stronger force that unites peoples than language. The struggle in Ukraine with the Russian language is the clearest proof of this thesis “by the contrary”.

This topic is also important for communication in the sphere of the Orthodox church, which unites Russians and Belarusians. In what language do priests serve in their churches in Belarus? Not only in Latin or Polish, but also in Belarusian, and today often in Russian.

Old Church Slavonic is the basis of all three East Slavic languages, but today it is difficult for understanding, especially for young people. A young man comes to church, begins to listen to the service and understands little. Turns around and leaves. This is also a question of the communication mode, moreover, in the spiritual area that unites the peoples of Belarus and Russia.

On the eve of the Day of Unity of the Peoples of Belarus and Russia, on March 31, 2022, an expert media forum “Union State: Economic Integration – Development Tasks” was held. One of its sections was entirely devoted to the youth. It was called: “The role of youth in the preservation of historical heritage.”

One of the main conclusions of the section is that it is not necessary to treat young people only as the future, they are our present, and they are here and now. For them, the information space and communications has become a natural habitat, both with a plus and a minus sign. This is especially true for the generation born at the beginning of the century – the so-called Generation Z.

In this regard, the country’s communication mode should be analyzed, formed, and adjusted taking into account the youth factor. This is especially important now, when external – we can already say with certainty – forces hostile to Russia and Belarus are doing everything to promote their values, including discrediting patriotism, asserting the priority of personal benefits and comfort over the interests of their Fatherland and its sovereignty. At the same time, modern virtual technologies, technological advantages, many years of experience in advertising campaigns, etc. are actively used.

We must actively resist this, especially since the opportunities and time have not yet been lost.

Speaking at the expert media forum of the Union State, Special Representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry Maria Zakharova cited the words of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk: “Like a small tree, to which side it will be inclined, it will grow to its end, so the young man, to which he will first be instructed, will have it until the end of his life.”

I am sure that these words are directly related not only to young people, but also to the formation of a communication environment that has a tremendous impact on the sustainable development of the state. Therefore, the analysis and study of trends in changing communication modes is not only the subject of scientific research, but also the most important political and applied task.

Conclusions

An analysis of the relationship between political and communication modes shows that the communication mode is a broader systemic concept and allows to characterize the socio-political interactions in the state more deeply. As a research category, the communication mode makes it possible to analyze the role, significance, nature and content of communication between different institutions and social groups. In practical terms, the communication mode is a political and legal framework and a tool for regulating the processes of restriction, promotion (and in crisis conditions – propaganda) of certain meanings, norms and principles.

Controllability of the communication mode is a measure of control on the part of the control center (subjects of control that make decisions regarding the rules and institutions of communication) with the voluntary consent of control objects with the degree of their autonomy and subordination. The analysis is based on significant controllability parameters: 1) the location of the communication mode control center; 2) the degree of conventionality of the communication mode control center; 3) the ability of communication mode control centers to transfer it from one state to another without conflict; the ability to achieve controlled parameters of the communication mode; the ability to use the mechanisms of self-organization and self-reflection of control objects to regulate communication modes. The results of the study of controllability parameters on the example of the communication regime of Belarus made it possible to draw the following conclusions:

- the control center of the communication mode of Belarus is located inside the country and is concentrated by the top leadership of the country. Rules and norms are fixed by law. Informal norms do not play such a significant role as, for example, in the countries of Central Asia. To support the communication mode, a mass media system has been created, as well as control bodies so that the mode deviates minimally from the specified parameters;
- the goals of the communication regime of Belarus are defined in strategic government documents: ensuring information sovereignty, information neutrality, optimizing the system of interaction between government and society;
- despite the concentration of communications management in the hands of top state management, the control center coordinates its policy in the information sphere with the Russian side, which is due to integration processes and the need to coordinate efforts to counter external influences;

- creation of alternative control centers for communication modes and their attempts to seize control and dominate the system of communications and information were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, they continue to exist (with a location abroad);
- nowadays, the control center of the Belarusian communication mode is able to relatively conflict-free transfer the regime from one state to another, change the target parameters of the communication mode and modernize the tools for achieving them;
- the most vulnerable parameter of the communication mode is the mechanism of communication between the authorities and society, namely, the lack of involvement in communication with the authorities of self-organizing communities and communication networks (which are often not normatively institutionalized and, therefore, are difficult to control and regulate). We are talking about civil self-organizations, gathered, among other things, on the basis of non-political interests.

The communication mode, like the political mode, is a reflection of the situation in which the state and society live. The tendency to strengthen the regulation of the communication mode, the concentration of control in the highest political circles, the change in target parameters (the dominant of information sovereignty), which we have identified, are due to the reality in which Belarus finds itself. Namely, in conditions of strong external pressure, priority is given to the security of the state and society.

An essential characteristic of the communication mode of Belarus is its cross-border nature, which historically predetermined the degree of vulnerability of the Belarusian society and developed the level of information “immunity” and information stress resistance. Cross-border character determines the specifics of assessing public trust: in times of crisis, traditional criteria for assessing the level of trust do not accurately reflect the real state of society. In a transboundary environment, such parameters as the readiness to protect the internal space of the country have a significant impact.

Features of the communication mode of Belarus are historically determined. Features of the climate, soil, economic life, geographical location of Belarus predetermined that the evolution of the communication mode was carried out in the conditions of contradictions between two trends: 1) the development of a system of vertical communications, typical for countries with an institutional matrix with dominating redistributive institutions, and 2) a system of horizontal communications, which is typical for countries with the dominance of market institutions in the institutional matrix. As a result, two cores of the communication mode were formed, one of which is associated with the Catholic Church, which makes it impossible to build a rigid hierarchical communication model absolutely controlled by the authorities in Belarus.

The religious factor plays a significant role in the formation of communication modes in a number of countries. The uniqueness of Belarus lies in the fact that the concept of traditional confessions is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic. That is, the significance of the confession is due to its influence on the historical, spiritual and cultural development of the Belarusian people. These faiths include Christianity, Judaism and Islam. According to a number of participants in the discussion, it is important to take this factor into account when studying the communication mode. According to other scientists, despite the fact that the territory of present-day Belarus has always been and is on the

civilizational frontier and historically it has been influenced by Western Catholicism, one should not overestimate the influence of the religious factor. In addition, confessions do not have their own media of the same level as Spas in Russia. In modern society a much more significant split in the assessments of the norms and rules of communication takes place between the urban and rural populations (and not among people of different faiths). This is what requires serious sociological research and reflection.

The content situation of the communication mode is closely related to the issues of historical memory. In Belarus, historically influenced by both the West and the East, there are two main principles that influence the development of the Belarusian statehood: 1) an independent Eastern European national project (regionalism); 2) Belarus is part of a large Russian project (Western Russianism). The dominance of one or another point of view is determined by political elites and often depends on the specific historical context. Sometimes some meanings are updated that have not only integration, but also conflict potential. In such situations, there are threats to the conceptual integrity of the integration project of Russia and Belarus. Therefore, issues of historical memory require constant attention from the political, academic and expert communities of the two countries.

In the formation and maintenance of the country's communication mode, the media and new media play an important role. Summarizing the opinions of the participants in the discussion, we will show the key problems of Belarus: 1) there are practically no quality media for children and youth in the Republic; 2) in the open information space, the media and new media projects of ideological opponents of the current communication mode of Belarus quantitatively dominate (all union media do not cover even 1/3 of the audience that our opponents cover); 3) low popularity of union media. During the years of union integration, a common information space of Russia and Belarus has developed as an equal and sovereign association of information spaces of the two states. Union media play a key role in its development (newspapers "Soyuznoye Veche" and "Soyuz. Belarus – Russia", the magazine "Soyuznoye Gosudarstvo", the portal of the Union State, and the TV and radio broadcasting organization of the Union State "BelRos"), which have accumulated large archives of information. However, these media are not popular; 4) underdevelopment of the system of national Belarusian media; 5) the difficulty of verifying information entering the society through the channels of new media and social networks.

For the development of a friendly communication mode, the preservation of the Russian language as the language of communication and the preservation of the socio-cultural community of Russia and Belarus play an essential role.

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