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The Problems of Communication Security of the Latin American Countries: the Manipulative Potential of the Communicative Space

“For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This third of Newton's laws of motion of classical mechanics is affecting the whole Spain-speaking world” – El Pais tells its readers¹. The statement concerns about the current crisis of neo-liberalism and the striving in the countries of Latin America to find their own solutions and their own place in the globalized world.

The global shift towards the new information age has brought new challenges and questions. Information needs management. This also means that we are living in a world which is not only shaped and defined by the proclaimed freedom of information and one's opinion. Our world is also a state of managed public opinion and information. Manipulation of information has become the decisive form of power. But, while it is widespread, it has also become more subtle, more sophisticated, and less evident.

War itself has become both virtual and real, with the former often dictating the outcome on the plane of the real.

Modern mass media are a powerful instrument in public opinion formation. The competition of the leading countries for the communicational advantage is growing ever more intense. The Western mass media, especially, mainstream media, are important facilitators and mediators, but also gatekeepers, of worldwide information, views, and opinions and they are winning in the battle for the hearts and minds of humanity.

In this context, it is worth considering the communicational security of Latin American countries or their communicative space as it has been shaped and dominated by the Western mass media.

Communication security is a system of measures used in public communications to defend the population against undesirable effects of information warfare². Among the main communication assets are the country's image and reputation formed within the communicative space. Greg Simons argues that narrative, vocabulary, values and images need minute sifting for the desired effect³. Russian communication specialist Svetlana Plotnikova

¹ Latinoamérica busca su sitio. 2012.

URL: internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2012/09/18/actualidad/1347987179_939705.html (Accessed 24.09.2012).

² Пашенцев Е.Н. Коммуникационный менеджмент и стратегическая коммуникация. М., 2012. С. 16.

³ Simons G. Understanding Political and Intangible Elements in Modern Wars // XV International Conference “Culture, Person, Society in the Modern World: Methodology and Experience of Empirical Research”. Yekaterinburg, 2012. P. 12.

points out that, within one and the same communicative space, people can be situated in various geographical locations⁴. Distances do not play an essential role. What is really important is what is being said, to whom, by whom, in which media, how fast and how effectively. The meaning does, however, still matter, and so does, the search for truth. To report the truth, to arrive at the truth, to fight for the truth is vital in the formation of the communicative space. The communicative space itself is made of a number of components, layers, and dimensions a combination of which comes together to form a resulting image or persona of the participant in the act of communication⁵.

Tatyana Vorontsova outlines the following ways by means of which communicative space is being formed: 1) intrusion into the communicative space of the addressee in order to change it in accordance with the sender's values and views; 2) expression of the sender's values and views without deforming those of the addressee; 3) formation of a completely new communicative space together with the addressee⁶.

As DSc, Prof. Evgeny Pashentsev points out, these strategies together with others further tend to augment the salience of informational warfare as the systematic and widely used means of primary choice in achieving geopolitical aims by the U.S. and its allies at the expense of other nations. The effectiveness of such communication methods has begun posing political problems and even serious security threats. In the absence of thorough social, political and economic changes and reforms, nations that are subjected to those massive communication attacks are bound to become ever more vulnerable to destabilization, loss of sovereignty, and, ultimately, to regime change the doctrine of which now forms the strategic course of U.S. foreign policy.

The objective of strategic communication is to provide audiences with truthful and timely information that will induce their support of on the communicator's goals or policies. In addition to truthfulness and timeliness, the information must be delivered to the right audience in an accurate way⁷.

Latin America is obviously of strategic interest for the world powers. And while the battle for the role and place of Latin America in the world is going on in every sphere, it is especially heightened in the communicative space.

⁴ *Плотникова С.Н. Языковое, дискурсивное и коммуникативное пространство // Вестник ИГЛУ. 2008. С. 134.*

⁵ *Гаспаров Б.М. Язык, память, образ. Лингвистика языкового существования // Новое литературное обозрение. С. 295.*

⁶ *Воронцова Т.А. Коммуникативное пространство в лингвопрагматической парадигме // Вестник Удмуртского университета. 2009. Вып. 1. С. 16.*

⁷ *Stavridis J. Strategic Communication and National Security // JFQ. Issue 46. 3d quarter, 2007. P. 4.*

Despite the increasingly global economy and the unprecedented spread of modern technology, the immense majority of people in the world do not travel internationally. In this situation, the media play a key role in the formation of other countries' images. According to John McNelly and Fausto Izcaray, the mass media shape people's understanding – or misunderstanding – of other peoples' countries⁸. More than seventy-five years ago Walter Lippmann observed that people depend on the mass media for their information about the world outside their community. The mass media play a crucial role in constructing the image of various societies and their peoples. As Victor Navasky noted, we make up our national mind on the basis of journalism⁹.

Among the most popular topics are news about society itself: from brand-new ideas of social networking and social media to less favorite but more urgent problems of social care reforms or even social sickness. Latin America too is following this trend. In Latin America, leftist governments are currently in the midst of uphill battles for social justice that would benefit the poor and ultra poor people. Let us just consider some examples.

At present, Bolivia is implementing a number of initiatives launched by Evo Morales that are designated to increase spending on social programs such as health care and education for the poor. Three major programs have been developed with hydrocarbon revenues: Bono Juancito Pinto, Renta Dignidad, and Bono Juana Azurduy.

Bono Juancito Pinto began in 2006. It gives grants of 200 bolivianos (approximately US\$29) yearly to children as an incentive to continue their education through the sixth grade of primary school; students must be enrolled in school to receive it. In July, 2008, President Evo Morales modified the decree, widening the benefit to 8th grade of elementary public schools. This modification also made the Ministry of Education responsible for the bond payment.

Established in 2006 in honor of a 12-year old boy, a hero of the War of the Pacific in 1879, who fought against invading troops, the stipend has been an important factor in the reduction of absences in the classroom by 6% to current levels of only 1.9% throughout the whole country.

The Juancito Pinto bursary distributed 378 million bolivianos (54 million dollars) from the royalties of the direct tax on hydrocarbons and the mining sector between 1,891,000 students over eight levels of the educational system in more than 14,000 primary and

⁸ McNelly J. T., Izcaray F. International news exposure and images of nations // *Journalism Quarterly*. №63 (3). 1986. Pp. 546–553.

⁹ Cited in Zelizer B. Allan S. *Journalism after September 11*th. London, 2002.

secondary schools throughout the entire Plurinational State.

Around 60% of students that receive this benefit live in urban areas, and 40% are from rural zones; the assistance also covers some six thousand students with disabilities registered in specialist centers. Since 2006 the government has paid out more than 1,881 million bolivianos in the distribution of the bursary, according to the report of the *Memoria de Apuntes Esenciales* (Report of Essential Notes) from the Ministry of Education. The Minister of Development Planning, Viviana Caro, confirmed that with this payment, Bolivia is very close to achieving school retention at 100% at the elementary level, complying with the challenges set out for 2015.

Renta Dignidad began in 2008 as an expansion of the previous Bonosol program. It gives grants to all low-income residents over age 60 to prevent extreme poverty among the elderly: 1800 bolivianos (approximately US\$258) are provided to those who receive Social Security payments and 2400 (approximately \$344) who do not.

Bono Juana Azurduy (also known as the Bono Madre Niño Niña) began in May 2009. It gives funds to uninsured new mothers as an incentive for them to seek medical care during and after their pregnancies in order to reduce maternal and infant mortality. New mothers receive 50 bolivianos each for four pre-natal medical visits, 120 bolivianos for the childbirth, and 125 bolivianos for each medical appointment until the child's second birthday. Mothers must show that they have the required medical visits in order to receive the funds.

In 2010, Bolivia passed a new pension law that lowers the retirement age from 65 to 58, bucking a global trend for raising the pension age to cope with rising life expectancies. The law – will for the first time give pensions to the 60% of the workforce who work in informal jobs – such as market traders or taxi drivers – as long as they make contributions. Women – for whom the current pensionable age is 60 – will be able to retire at 55 if they have more than three children. Many other countries have recently increased the pension age to deal with rising life expectancy and an aging population.

Morales supporters say that the greater state control of the oil and gas sectors helped to boost government income. His critics say that state intervention may work well for redistributing income, but not for encouraging investment, technical and managerial expertise and the eradication of corruption. They also predict that taking the money from the private sector and giving it to those who do not work and never wanted to do so would hamper the economy and its competitiveness. More serious accusations concern the character of these

social initiatives. Critics argued that these measures are short-term, radical or polarizing.¹⁰ Of course, one cannot deny that these accusations are to some extent justified as more than 200 000 new children and adults have been added to the ranks of the poor (2008), and nearly 300 000 people have left the country looking for better life opportunities elsewhere (2008). But without these programs, the situation would have been even significantly worse. Moreover, people who are hungry need to be fed today, not tomorrow; they need to be given a chance to live in the first place. By definition, long-term improvements require more time.

Brazil has developed its own approach to tackle poverty. First Lula and later D. Russel invested heavily into support programs for the poorer population. To name but few there are the Bolsa Familia project, Zero Hunger, Brazil without poverty, Minha Casa, Minha Vida. The main component of *Fome Zero* consists of a conditional cash transfer program, *Programa Bolsa Família* (PBF), which distributes monetary benefits to families that comply with specific income and human capital requirements. The basis of this program is to provide a better quality of life for the children through education and healthy eating practices.

In a direct response to the United Nation's first Millennium Development Goal (MDG), which challenges the world to halve the proportion of people suffering from hunger and extreme poverty by 2015, Brazil and the administration of President Lula da Silva instituted the *Fome Zero* strategy.

Russian researchers also praise some of the social initiatives, for example, Minha Casa, Minha Vida, calling it one of the most efficient anti-crisis programs which turned out to give a boost to the construction sector in Brazil. The Ministry of Labor estimates that the program created 532 000 jobs and provided additional GDP increase at 0.7%.

Notably interesting is the fact that only Spanish press made an attempt to make a few comments about these social programs. Neither British nor German mass media paid attention to the Bolivian efforts; the same is also true for Italian and French mass media. Western media outlets instead concentrate on the continuous strikes that produce serious problems for the government, presenting the Bolivian policies of social mobilization as nothing more than a "catastrophic stalemate." The Center for Economic and Policy Research is, however, more upbeat in its assessment. The 2009 CEPR report on Bolivia says: "At the same time, there is much more to be done, especially to reduce extreme poverty, which remains high, and its consequences in terms of health outcomes and educational levels. With regard to future growth and development, the country is not financially constrained, and its success going forward would appear to depend more on its ability to successfully plan and implement

¹⁰ Leftist Governments in Latin America. Cambridge, 2010. P. 75–76.

development projects, involving both public and private investment¹¹”.

The Western mass media are also united in ignoring Brazil’s social reforms. One can hardly ever find a single article that would cover what is in the forefront of Brazil’s domestic politics. Only BBC Brazil bothered to report that D. Russef launched a second stage of the social policy programs. But the note immediately tried to add a fly into the ointment by emphasizing various conceivable drawbacks that could mar the realization of the new policies...

We can draw from this an important conclusion: right-wing governments cannot afford praising leftist initiatives. And they cannot explain that paradox that Brazil is expanding its welfare state, while Europe is cutting back on welfare. In these circumstances, Western mass media either willfully ignore the unpalatable topic or they shower it with derision from a self-appointed position of assumed superiority.

Bolivia is a weak brand country, which arouses little of interest and concern in the minds of the Europeans. Brazil does not make headline news in the West. At the same time, though, Brazil does enjoy notable popularity with various mass media audiences that range from sports fans (in connection with the coming Olympic Games in Brazil) to experts (in connection with Brazil’s new status as a recognized strategic partner of the EU).

The “image of a country” is formed in the communication space – in the minds and hearts of mass audiences. Much of this image and its projection is a result of the language, which the media deploy, and especially of the value- and emotion-loaded words, phrases, metaphors, sentences and adjectives etc. Often, the tone is as important as the content itself. There is, indeed, a sharp difference in the language used by Western mass media depending on whether their governments support or oppose a foreign country’s government. Thus, the claims of the media’s objectivity, professionalism, independence, or neutrality notwithstanding, Western powers’ foreign policy objectives remain one of the most salient “independent variables,” that is to say, a key determinant in how the Western media treat or “massage” others’ image and reputation. In particular, the continued dominance of the communicative space by the Western corporate (or rather incorporated) media also continue to pose serious communication security problems for the Latin American countries, which range from general negative perception to deliberate hostility and absence of allies. It is worth noting that, in the communication space, the Russian Federation faces challenges that are in many ways very similar and which also pose both present and long-term serious security risks.

¹¹ Bolivia: the Economy during Morales Administration. 2009. URL: www.cepr.net/documents/publications/bolivia-2009-12.pdf (24.09.2012)

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