UNDERSTANDING IRAN’S TELEVISION AND RADIO PROGRAMS TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract. Here we show the factors activating Iran's desire to strengthen the information policy towards Central Asia. International television and radio broadcasting is one of main instruments of the Iranian public diplomacy towards Central Asia. The special part in realization of information policy assigned to the Uzbek service of Mashhad radio station which reflects the purposes and strategy of Iran concerning Central Asia. On 2007 Iran started the new English-speaking satellite channel "Press TV" in hope of opposition to such channels as BBC, CNN and Fox News. Its programs attempt to present Iran as the impartial and peaceful mode. Television channel "Press TV" being one of the few tools of "the soft power" of Iran, allows extending ideological influence in the Central Asian region, and its policy is aimed at neutralization of influence of the western mass media. The television channel attracts the audience of intellectual and politically active part of the population of Uzbekistan presenting them an alternative view of the major events in the world connected with policy. It is expected that strengthening of the information and psychological activity of Iran’s mass media in Central Asia as public diplomacy. Iran’s Information activity for the next years is aimed at the solution of long-term plans of the nation in Central Asia and demands carrying out purposeful actions in the region in the.

Keywords: information policy, public diplomacy, broadcasting, Iran, Uzbekistan, propaganda.

Introduction

Central Asia is the region of priority geopolitical and economic interests of Iran. Iran attaches the maximum significance to Uzbekistan. More than a half of all visits, efforts and initiatives of Iran in Central Asia are aimed at Uzbekistan (Knyazev, 2009). Strengthening of positions in Central Asia gives Iran an opportunity to solve some interrelated issues: helps Islamic republic to end isolation; provide economic dividends, bring real benefits from trade and economic cooperation (Zvigelskaya, 2014); offers Iran high potential for increase of railway and land transport for an exchange of goods; gives the chance to receive benefits from transit and customs duties (Maleki, 2013); provides access to important energy resources (Kiani, 2014); increases a role of Iran in transportation of gas and oil from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf and the Oman sea that turns Iran into a superpower of the XXI century (Kooalee et al., 2014).

In the near future important aspects of Iran’s the relations with the Central Asian states will remain strengthening regional cooperation and control of energy resources of the region by laying of pipelines through territory of Iran (Khan, 2012). Iran's foreign policy in Central Asia is composed of a combination of ideological, geopolitical and cultural civilization approaches, with geopolitical considerations of the area as top priority (Kooalee et al., 2014). Political and economic sanctions against Iran strengthen its aspiration to dominate in Central Asia and to consider the region as the mediator for realization of economic interests of the Islamic republic in the European markets (Naghiyev, 2012).

The need for the diversification of revenues to the Iranian economy which mainly formed from export of hydrocarbons due to expansion of the Iranian business in the region has to fill the uncollected income from the export of goods limited to sanctions. Iran also pursues the goal to establish close connections with the large states of the region to become the most important geopolitical player in Central Asia.

The Iranian leadership, taking into account several factors has a special view of relationship with the states of Central Asia, and shows basic interest in increase of their level. Uzbekistan is located in strategically important region of Central Asia and has considerable economic and agricultural potential/ Therefore Tehran is inclined to consider the relations with Tashkent among priority ones in relationship with the countries of the region.
Iran's Information policy towards Central Asia

Iran has a mechanism of forming and realization of information policy towards the countries of Central Asia which also includes Uzbekistan. The branched structure of institutes and instruments of ideological promotion in Iran works systemically.

Therefore, political, legal, socio-economic and ideological aspects of foreign policy of Iran towards Central Asia attaches special significance to the Uzbekistan. It’s primarily defined by geopolitical interests as well as ideological installations and a manipulation of religious factor. The idea of "export of Islamic revolution" which became a steady stereotype in world community isn't significant in regional policy of Iran and doesn't threaten to become as strategy of foreign policy of IRI in the near future. It’s geopolitical and geo-economics foundations can’t be considered as ideological.

Even though Iran refused to export Islamic revolution, Islam still remains an important element of foreign policy rhetoric of Tehran. The policy of Iran in Central Asia and in the Caucasus was defined, first of all, by geopolitical interests of the Iranian state. Ideological installations, in particular distribution of Islam, were of secondary importance (Kulagina, 2003).

The special attention is attributed to a similarity of cultural values which is considered stable ideological base of Iran’s penetration into Central Asia and expansion of its influence. According to the Iranian politicians and experts, cultural integration with Central Asia can play a positive role in Iran’s activity in the international organizations, and also promote further inclusion of these republics in an orbit of foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran is considering the need of development of new policy for Central Asia which would bring the expected results. After gaining independence by the country of Central Asia Iran faced a number of difficulties in this region and was compelled to refuse carrying out aggressive and radical foreign policy (Farhadinisab, 2010). For use of the existing potential and minimization of factors which disturb cultural cooperation, the Islamic Republic of Iran needs realistic planning and a choice of simple and rational strategy, instead of domination of ideology of Islamic culture, the inherent to Islamic Republic in the interstate relations (Kiani, 2014).

The role of TV and radio broadcasting in Iran's information policy

International TV and radio broadcasting serves as main instrument of the Iranian public diplomacy (Zinko, 2009). The special part in realization of information policy is assigned to the Uzbek service of Mashhad radio station which reflects the purposes and strategy of Iran concerning Central Asia. The radio station widely covers the potential of Uzbekistan, its energy resource opportunities, socio-economic and cultural aspects and everyday life of citizens. Radio materials about Uzbekistan pursue the following goals: satisfy needs of listeners for information about Uzbekistan so they don't have to use other mass media to obtain news, create representation at audience that they listen to "not foreign radio", imitation of picture of Iran as friendly country towards Uzbekistan. Anti-western and anti-Israeli rhetoric is skillfully used for this purpose in the pro-Iranian propaganda materials. For example, as of December 1, 2014 the words "the Zionist, Zionism" are used respectively on the site of Mashhad radio station – in 5 482 materials, on the site of “Press TV” television channel – in 33 180 materials. The emphasis on a similarity of cultural values is considered stable ideological base of penetration of Iran into Central Asia and expansion of influence. The essence of broadcasts on cultural subject is reduced to that "the Iranian civilization is a culture cradle in Central Asia, without knowledge of the Persian language it is impossible to study literary, historical heritage of Uzbeks". It is pertinent to mention material of radio station of March 26, 2013 where with reference to the attaché for culture of Embassy of Iran in Uzbekistan Hamid Mustafavi it was noted that "a holiday of Nowruz is accepted as a holiday of the beginning of year by all people, being under the influence of culture and a civilization of Iran".

Iran, along with promotion strengthening "similarities of culture and prevalence of the Iranian civilization in the region of Central Asia", uses religious feelings of the population. As a prove to it we can note the existence of broadcasts on religious subject for the Sunni and Shia Muslims. It is remarkable that prominent theologians of Uzbekistan are invited by Mashhad radio station when covering activity of the persons who are especially esteemed by Shiites.

For geopolitical reasons at potential multimillion audience of Central Asia Tehran tries to create image of Iran as "moderate Islamic country". The Uzbek service of Mashhad radio station transferred to air a program cycle, criticizing "Wahhabism" (Salafism), and negative information on Salafis is published on the website of the Russian service of radio "Tehran". Thereby, first, Iran seeks to inspire in listeners trust, and opinion that
the Iranian religious promotion "not extremist and not harmful". Secondly, the goal of discrediting of the rival in the Arab world in the opinion of listeners is pursued.

The noticeable role is also played by telecasting in Iran which is operated by the state giant - the Organization of radio and television which is financed by the Iranian government. On July 2, 2007 Iran started the new English-speaking satellite channel "Press TV". The television channel is based in Tehran, has the round-the-clock air, including, on the Internet. It is opened in hope of opposition to such channels as BBC, CNN and Fox News. As its programs consist of news, and also debate and documentaries about the Middle East in attempt to present Iran as the impartial and peaceful mode (Pahlavi, 2012)

Possibilities of a broadcasting of the Iranian international English-speaking television channel "Press TV" allow covering almost the whole world, including Uzbekistan. "Press TV" being one of the few tools of "the soft power" of Iran, allows to extend ideological influence in the Central Asian region, and its policy is aimed at neutralization of influence of the western mass media. The audience is presented by alternative point of view about world events, measures and ways of overcoming cultural disagreements between the West and Iran.

It should be noted that today “Press TV” channel in Uzbekistan doesn't possess the real power of information impact on society. However, the television channel attracts the audience of intellectual and politically active part of the population of Uzbekistan presenting them an alternative view of the major events in the world connected with policy.

Conclusion

It is expected that strengthening of the information and psychological activity of Iran’s mass media in Central Asia as public diplomacy for the next years is aimed at the solution of long-term plans of the nation and demands carrying out purposeful actions in the region. Iran intends to return the lost positions in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Rokhani's government formulated the new concept of a regionalism according to which Iran will try to increase the influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Blank, 2014). Noteworthy the opinion of the Iranian analyst Hassan Beheshtipour who attributes a crucial role to cultural ties in strengthening economic and political cooperation with the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. In his opinion, the culture is a basis of economic activity and political cooperation. The expert considers as perspective the following spheres: creation of the full-fledged information environment for Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan; the organization of seminars for the issues representing the general interest and the accounting of expert opinions; exchange of experience between journalists by training of workers of the press in Iran and the Iranian journalists in the countries of the region; implementation of joint scientific projects without emphasis on a nationality; sharing transport communications for an entry into seaports; reorganization of diplomatic missions of Iran in the region for increasing professional level of their work.

The Iranian analyst Hamidreza Azizi considers that public diplomacy as the most important tool which can be used for strengthening Iran’s influence in Central Asia. He offers two strategy of developing Iran’s relations with the countries of Central Asia; Cultural strategy: Use of opportunities of soft power for increase Iran’s influence taking into account proximity of religion, culture and an ethnic similarity. Creation and strengthening of public organizations, carrying out weeks of culture, distribution of newspapers and news channels in languages of local mass media of the region, implementation of programs for an exchange of students and scientific cooperation, tourism encouragement, the organization of trips of the politicians and decision makers to Iran, and etc. Economic strategy: Use of tools of economy and economic relations. Development of barter, cooperation in communications and transport, energy, investments and combating against drug trafficking.

According to the Iranian expert Modzhtaba Tuyserkan, public diplomacy is aimed at "the solution of long-term plans of the country in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It demands creation and strengthening of structures within the country and purposeful actions in the Central Eurasia". In his opinion, the Islamic republic undertakes following steps for achievement of productivity of Iran’s public diplomacy in Central Asia: creation of multilateral communication channels in the Persian language and other most widespread languages of Central Asia and the Caucasus; rapprochement of cultural traditions and ideologies, socio-political realities with regional norms; elimination of misunderstanding in the sphere of Iran’s foreign policy towards the republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus; adjustment of information and news dialogue between Iran and the countries of the Central Eurasia; expansion of political activity of Iran in respect of settlement of internal and regional crises in Central Asia and in the Caucasus; creation of prerequisites and
encouragement of studying of the Persian language, literature and culture at universities of the region; investment of infrastructure projects in the countries of the region; high-quality creation and quantitative expansion of representations of advisers for culture of Iran in the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, and also creation of joint bureaus on culture; encouragement of Iranians to emigration to the countries of the region with the scientific and cultural purposes for transfer of domestic culture to foreign countries; creation of necessary prerequisites for attraction of tourists from the region; creation of societies of friendship of Iran with all countries of Central Asia and Caucasus; strengthening of work of diplomatic staff on creation of the atmosphere of mutual trust with all countries of the region; use of the Iranian initiative of dialogue of civilizations with all countries of Central Asia. It is remarkable that only one point provides capital investments in economy while other points are aimed at activization of cultural, ideological and information propaganda.

References

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