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THE GREATER MEDITERRANEAN AS AN OPEN REGION: MEDIA SPACE RESEARCH PROGRAMME

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Abstract

In the history of humanity, several water areas and territories of intensive multilateral communication are known. The area including the coast and islands of the Mediterranean Sea and its associated seas is possibly the key one of them. Together, they form the macro-region of the Greater Mediterranean. The historical heritage and modern geopolitical processes endow the geographical region of the Greater Mediterranean with deep social and political meanings. Also, the relevance and importance of determining the geopolitical and geostrategic status of this region, understanding, and analysis of its social, information, and media spaces have now returned. The authors of the article describe the program of their own research of the social and media space of the Greater Mediterranean macro-region, relying, on the one hand, on a historical predisposition to create social and geopolitical spaces in the region, on the other hand, on the modern political diversity, multiculturalism, differentiation of social connections and the information environment. The authors of the article conclude that the macro-region of the Greater Mediterranean is regaining the significance of a globalization center, which is not just a region of a clash of civilizations, but an open region that accommodates a new social landscape, forms new communication links and social interaction formats.

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Keywords: Macro-region, the Greater Mediterranean, media space, Internet space, media cartography.



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1. Introduction

For the first time, the Greater Mediterranean region was defined in the Memorandum of Russian Policy in the Mediterranean region of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation dated November 27, 1995 and the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of 2000 as a connecting hub for such regions as the Middle East, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, and the Caspian basin (RF Government, 2000). It implies a wider understanding of the Mediterranean macro-region in comparison with the European one.

2. Problem Statement

The traditional European approach to define the borders of the Mediterranean (Euro-Mediterranean region) at a practical level is embodied in the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, which is initiated by the EU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), established under the auspices of the UN. So, UfM includes all 28 EU countries and 14 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Syria (suspended membership in December 2011), Tunisia, Turkey, PNA), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Monaco, and Montenegro); Libya has the observer status in the Union. There are more precise borders of the Mediterranean macro-region in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean.

The Russian concept of the Greater Mediterranean implies close political, economic, strategic, and cultural relations both within the Euro-Mediterranean region and with regional systems bordering it. In particular, the Black Sea and Caspian areas will be the part of this macro-region. Thus, the borders of the Greater Mediterranean are as follows:

- states of Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Andorra, Monaco, Italy, Republic of San Marino, Greece, Malta, Cyprus);
- states of Southeast Europe (Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania);
- Eastern Mediterranean countries (Turkey, Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Palestinian national autonomy);
- states of the Southern Mediterranean (Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria);
- states of the Black Sea region (Russian Federation, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Romania, Ukraine);
- states of the Caspian region (Azerbaijan, Iran).

In Russian political science there are several research cases either focusing on the study of its components (the Mediterranean region (Euro-Mediterranean), the Black Sea region, the Middle East) or considering this macro-region as the Mediterranean-Black Sea one (Kovalskiy, 1995; Zhurkin & Kovalskiy, 1999). With the development of new priorities of the foreign policy agenda of Russia, the interests of Russia in the Mediterranean region change, which finds its reflection in several studies (Zhurkin, 2005). The issues related to the EU policy Mediterranean direction implementation (Kovalskiy, 2001; Tatarintsev, 2009) are analyzed, a group of studies on the development of the EU Mediterranean

policy and the development of the Barcelona process (Anikeeva, 2017; Noskov, 2015; Tatarchuk, 2010; Tkachenko, 2007; Trofimova, 2012), on the problems of overcoming the migration crisis in Europe in 2014-2016 (Arbatova & Kokeyev, 2016; Kondratiyeva & Potyomkina, 2015; Latkina, 2014; Potyomkina, 2015) is being formed.

The Russian political science literature presents several studies of the Black Sea region. Both the multi-authored monograph “Russia in the Black Sea Region” (1993) and the report of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences “Russian Security. Black Sea Region” (1997) are the complex projects studying the field of the Russian Federation interest in the Black Sea region through the prism of the national safety. In the works of Russian scientists, the influence of geopolitical and informational factors on the policy to ensure the national security of Russia in the Black Sea region, the problems of redistribution and features of the further development of hydrocarbon transit in this region is considered (Kovalskiy, 1997; Kovalskiy et al., 1993).

Foreign Mediterranean region studies are characterized by the constructivist approach, based on the recognition of a high degree of heterogeneity of the region and the asymmetry of relations between its Northern and Southern subregions, which predetermines difficulties in developing a common European security strategy and foreign policy even within the framework of the European Mediterranean Partnership. These problems are analyzed in the works by Adler and Crawford (2002), Aliboni (1991), Cardwell (2008), Pace (2004) and Tanner (2002).

Many authors noted the uniqueness of the Mediterranean civilizational synthesis. The essay by Braudel (1998), “History of land and sea” is especially noteworthy. He defines the Mediterranean as “a colorful patchwork quilt, a crossroads with all the people living in it, flora and fauna, which is perceived as a harmonious image, as a kind of system where everything is first “merged into one pot”, and then is born again in an original holistic form” (p. 64). He considers the essence of the Mediterranean from several angles – not only geographic and territorial, but also social:

It is not only a matter of nature, although it plays a crucial role, and not only of a person whose perseverance is the key to nature but both at the same time. The nature of this region can be both generous and destructive, and human activity today is as diverse as in the past. In other words, it is all about an endless chain of accidents, successes, and failures. (Braudel, 1998, p. 74)

According to the “Braudelian” determinism, “layers of reality that are least changed — natural and geographical conditions – at the same time, determine human life to the greatest extent. The economy and social structure depend on them” (Braudel, 1998, p. 80). According to Braudel (2002), “to move from the Mediterranean space in the proper sense, limited by the climatic framework, to the Mediterranean in the expanded understanding to which this space gravitates, means to move from certain natural integrity to that social whole” (p. 27). His metaphor is about the economic and social space as a force field, the nodes of which the cities are, and the roads reflect power lines. It has already become classic in defining the socio-spatial integrity of regions: “The social integrity of the Mediterranean lies both in this space of roads, the space of cities, and in these power points and lines” (Braudel, 2002, p. 39).

3. Research Questions

For analysis and understanding of the studied processes, it is supposed to solve such problems as:

- media cartography of the media in the countries of the macro-region;
- identification of factors affecting the structure and activities of the media infrastructure of the countries of the macro-region, its European and southern parts;
- identification of integration and disintegration factors of the media space of the macro-region;
- the study of the social effects of hybridization of the media sphere of the countries of the Great Mediterranean;
- intellectual search for markers of stability and interconnection of communication infrastructures of countries of the macro-region;
- search and installation of actors and hubs of media and Internet space of the countries of the macro-region;
- segmentation of the Internet space of the macro-region, depending on the specifics of the Internet segments of its states;
- identification of actors and leaders of public opinion in the information flows of network communities of the macro-region;
- identification of online communities and the system of interconnection between them in the network communities of the macro-region;
- identification of topics and discourses of information flows of network communities of the macro-region;
- analysis of the weight, dynamics, the modality of information flows of network communities of the macro-region.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our research is the media and Internet space of the Greater Mediterranean macro-region, which now is one of the world's outposts of communication, including network and media. Taking into account the multi-ethnicity, multi-confessional, multi-cultural, diverse everyday forms of the population in the countries of the macro-region, the demand for data on the nature, specificity, and patterns of formation and structuring of information and media flows in the region is increasing.

5. Research Methods

Digital methods of data collection and processing, analysis of "big data," mathematical modeling of network communities of the countries of the Great Mediterranean region become the tools of the project. It will provide an opportunity to get practice-oriented development of the Greater Mediterranean macro-region analysis using sociological and cybermetric methods.

The research bases on the methodology of the intellectual search for digital markers of political processes, methods of social computing, methods of Data Mining, Predictor Mining, methods of Social Media Analysis, discursive approach and discourse analysis technique. Some techniques are implied to

identify “intensity markers” and “content markers” in the socio-media space of the countries of the Greater Mediterranean; cognitive mapping of social media macro-region; discursive analysis of information flows of social networks and microblogging; structuring and identifying the share of information flows of the Internet space of the countries of the macro-region. Intent analysis is used to determine the impact technologies of actors and leaders of public opinion in the data flows of the network communities of the countries of the macro-region, which as a result will allow the modeling of the communication infrastructure of the media space and the construction of a media map of the countries of the macro-region of the Greater Mediterranean.

6. Findings

Based on Braudel’s approach to the formation of the social space of the Mediterranean territories, we will try to describe the structure of the study of the social and information medium of the present-day Greater Mediterranean macro-region in the perspective of analysis of network communities and the media sphere of its countries. From our point of view, the research of the socio-media space of the Greater Mediterranean macro-region should take place, based on several aspects:

1. Historical predisposition to the creation of the social spaces of countries through maritime communications in the region. The so-called “Mediterranean space” is the reclaiming of the coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea and the foundation of settlements around it, due to which the ethnic groups of the entire coastal zone gradually began to interact. Due to the sea, the quicker and more convenient connection between different coastal areas, including the distant ones, became possible. This opportunity made a credible exchange of goods, resources, people, and ideas real. Thanks to maritime logistics, the quick deploy of large contingents of troops or labor force over long distances became possible.

2. Experience in the formation of an integrated geopolitical space in the region. The Greater Mediterranean as an integrated system was formed long before the appearance of the same ones in other parts of the world. Moreover, the area of the Greater Mediterranean determined the development paths of the rest of the planet. This process happened for many reasons; we highlight the main ones. First, between all the territories of the Mediterranean at the dawn of mankind, there was the most mobile, at that time, ability to travel - by water on ships and boats, which made it possible to exchange goods favorably, receive new technologies, develop their knowledge, share cultural and spiritual values. Secondly, on the coast and islands of the Greater Mediterranean, earlier than elsewhere, the first states known to humankind arose. Thirdly, here earlier than in other regions of the world, many inventions and technologies appeared. Production and use of wheels; invented writing and numbers; application of mathematical calculus in the creation of geographical and astronomical maps, irrigation systems; manufacture of brass, iron smelting; the use of navigation, household, medical devices; the construction of pyramids, temples, palaces, residential and other structures; the use of medicines, food and recipes, etc. were taken by neighbors. Fourth, the inhabitants of the Greater Mediterranean left behind various artifacts, monuments of material culture and art, written and oral information sources, myths, tales, religions, which have not only spread to the whole world but still affect the mankind.

3. The experience of uniting the peoples of the region into a single geopolitical space. There was an attempt to integrate the Greater Mediterranean in the framework of the centralized empire of

Alexander the Great, who intended to defeat Persia and, using Greek colonies, from the Atlantic to the Black Sea, to create a world empire based on democratic principles. A successful attempt to unite the Greater Mediterranean in a centralized empire was undertaken by the Roman Empire, as a result of which Rome became a centralized state, and municipalization and federalization became the basis of the imperial form of government. Uniting not with cities, but with countries, Rome turned into an empire and united under its rule the region of the Greater Mediterranean.

4. The political diversity, multiculturalism, polysociality and polymedia in the present-day territory. Nowadays, the Greater Mediterranean macro-region is politically, socially, culturally, linguistically, and media diversified, which characterizes it as an international center of network and social-media communication.

In the analysis of the history of the Greater Mediterranean, the antinomies of integrity are applicable in substantiating the integrity or discreteness of a region during the described period of development. They help to find ways to improve it and transit from political, legal, economic systems of the historical past to more advanced cultural, social, information systems. They form the social portrait and media image of the Greater Mediterranean macro-region at the present stage of development.

In the present-day world, characterized by the dynamics of macroregionalization and globalization, the importance of the formation of extensive regions is increasing. The Russian Federation is not outside such processes, but, on the contrary, is becoming an active actor in this dynamic. The Russian state brought several formative factors into the building of Mediterranean macro-region, both geopolitically and militarily, diplomatically, economically, and socioculturally. The Greater Mediterranean macro-region is a geographical, geopolitical, geo-economic and cultural space located between the Black Sea region, Southern Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, the Caucasus and the Caspian basin. For several reasons, this region is strategically significant for Russia, which is confirmed by the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of 2000 and 2008.

At the present stage, it is difficult for traditional military-political alliances to resist nowadays challenges and threats. They are being replaced by network diplomacy, based on flexible forms of participation in multilateral structures and of social and civic partaking, on methods of forming and promoting meanings and values through social media, information resistance, cultural expansion and display of implicit hostile influence.

One cannot ignore the factor of increasing regional threats, which reinforces the significance of the Greater Mediterranean for Russia. The increased presence of NATO, the growing military-terrorist threat, the reunification of Crimea with Russia have changed the military-strategic, geopolitical, and diplomatic positions of the Russian state in the region. At the same time, the task of building an effective system of network activity in the macro-region of the Greater Mediterranean became urgent.

In the Greater Mediterranean, a series of territorial conflicts of an ethnic, confessional and multicultural nature, in which both states and quasi-state and non-state actors are involved, have taken place throughout history and are now taking place. Nevertheless, the Greater Mediterranean remains to be one of the world centers of the international network, social, cultural, and media communication. This characteristic of the macro-region generates several requests. The first one is to study the specifics of the information flows of its countries, in particular, according to the criterion of interstate interaction of the

Russian state with them; then to segment the Internet and media space of the region. The third one is to identify leaders of public opinion in the information flows of network communities of the countries of the macro-region. Ultimately it will make it possible to construct a multidimensional model of Russia's "soft power" in the region of the Greater Mediterranean.

7. Conclusion

Nowadays the macro-region of the Greater Mediterranean is regaining the significance of a globalization center, which is not just a region of a clash of civilizations, but an open territory containing a new social landscape, developing new communication links and social interaction formats. And this is facilitated by the fact that it activates the integration aspirations, with varying degrees of intensity and with different priorities. However, in any case, if being implemented, they can change the whole geopolitical situation in the world.

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