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**MERCOSUR'S  
COMMUNICATION  
POLICIES:  
CONSIDERATIONS ON  
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY<sup>1</sup>**

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1. Paper presented at the GP Policies of Information, Communication and Culture, XVI Meeting of Research Groups in Communication, component event of the XXXIX Brazilian Congress of Communication Sciences.

**Abstract:** The present work proposes a reflection on the concept of public diplomacy as a public policy of communication in intergovernmental relations. In the light of this concept, it is intended to analyze Mercosur's public communication, taking as empirical object the Guideline for Communication Policy in the Decision of the Common Mercosur Council (CMC n° 47/2014), and minutes of the Specialized Social Communication Meeting (RECS-Mercosur) . Preliminary analyzes indicate that Mercosur citizens do not identify themselves as such, in view of the reduced participation of civil society in the construction of Mercosur's communication policies, as well as deficiencies in the visibility and newsworthiness of the Bloc's actions, both in internal public opinion and in the international media.

**Keywords:** Right to communication; public diplomacy; social participation; public communication policy

## INTRODUCTION

The guarantees of the right to communication and the right to information are increasingly claimed as a citizen's right in the face of technological convergence scenarios where the virtuality of communication shortens distances and speeds up the circulation of messages. International law and documents produced by international organizations are constantly observed and revised since the formation of regional blocs, in the context of globalization and integration with a view to political, economic and cultural strengthening, is established as a new world order. How to guarantee citizenship rights in a context in which a significant part of people circulate and exchange information and cultures without borders, between territories connected by a block or not? What is the role

of public communication policies in the era of globalization?

The multidisciplinary intrinsic to the communicational field, especially when it intersects with the field of public policies and international relations, allows for a redirection of the look on the use of public policies and communication as instruments of public diplomacy. Since the Middle Ages, in foreign relations, postures have been discreet, negotiations have been kept secret and the diplomatic environment has been veiled. This is understandable, because in order to maintain good relations with neighboring countries, there must be discretion, respect for national sovereignty, and secrecy – especially in matters of security and borders. But to what extent does this model of action interfere with individual and collective rights?

For philosopher Kant (1975, p.46) “All actions that refer to the rights of other men, whose maxims are not in harmony with publicity, are unjust”, considering transparency as an element of morality in public acts. The public sphere and freedom of expression as elements of rationality become a threat to the culture of secrecy. In Habermas (2003) we have:

Historically, the polemical claim to this kind of rationality has developed against the policy of state secrecy practiced by princely authority in the context of the public reasoning of private persons. Just as secrecy serves to maintain a domination based on voluntas (will), so publicity must serve to enforce legislation based on ratio (reason). Habermas (2003, p. 71):

Therefore, under the lens of social communication, it is worth asking: is diplomacy interested in promoting a public communication policy? How is this policy formatted and what are the objectives of this policy in a context of regional integration, such as the case of Mercosur?

## THEORETICAL REFERENCE

In the field of international relations, the expression public diplomacy is a concept associated with promoting the image of a country or a regional bloc of countries, through the so-called soft power. In Brazil, at least within the scope of declared intentions, public diplomacy is understood not only in this traditional sense, but also in the sense of greater openness of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and foreign policy.

To civil society, in an effort to democratize and transparently national public policies.

Conceived as a public policy, foreign policy must, on the one hand, meet the aspirations of the population and aim at the national interest; on the other hand, foreign policy must also be inclusive, democratic and participatory. (ITAMARATY, 2016).

Margarethe Steinberger, when constructing an entry on public diplomacy to discuss the political economy of cultural relations in Latin America, states:

(...) a diplomacy whose effects fall on a group of specific beneficiaries, on a network or group of citizens, directly affected by diplomatic action: for example, arbitration in migration cases, labor legislation in the Mercosur automotive sector.

Although the history of Brazilian diplomacy has a tradition of almost two centuries, it has only recently begun to manifest itself in the form of "public diplomacy". The concept was developed in the 1980s, when the idea of "civil society" began to circulate in Brazil. Public diplomacy is one that incorporates popular dialogue in the formulation of foreign policy. On the one hand, this means that the media, public opinion and popular opinion are now gaining space as actors in the geopolitical field as well (...) (STEINBERGER, 2009, p. 168).

Considering social participation and public opinion, currently the concept has acquired new understandings, adding the technological point of view and the cultural changes of globalization. Public Diplomacy 2.0 would be the update of the concept for this process in which the citizen and society are increasingly integrated and participate in decision-making processes, at the speed at which information circulates, through technologies. But the focus of the discussion is communication as an essential instrument of diplomatic relations. As Alfredo Gómez (2013)<sup>2</sup> presents, "Public diplomacy is not possible without communication; in its absence there would not be one of the essential tools, if not the only one possible, to take the messages to different audiences" (GÓMEZ, 2013, p.63).

The concept considers the work of the institutional communication of the organizations in the international scope, taking into account the public opinion in the construction of the organizational image and identity. According to GÓMEZ, previously, the ability to build public opinion and decision-making was in the hands of elites: governments, big business or renowned intellectuals; and, in second order: media, teachers, writers and related professionals (2013, p.65). This author also points out that, today, the internet and portable and mobile technology are a model for the construction of a more universal and uncontrollable public opinion, with enormous influence on the identity of a country, as well as on its image abroad. Therefore, GÓMEZ presents public diplomacy as a paradigm shift in diplomatic relations. To what extent does this apply or could it apply to Mercosur?

Joseph Cull (2009, pp.55-56) proposes a taxonomy of the components of public diplomacy, their relationships and sources

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2. Our translation. "Without communication, public diplomacy is not possible; in its absence, one of the essential tools would be missing, if not the only possible one, to carry the messages to the different target audiences".

of credibility. According to Cull (2009, pp.55-56) the components<sup>3</sup> of public diplomacy are: a) listening (the basis of all public diplomacy); b) defense; c) cultural diplomacy; d) exchange; e) international broadcasting; and f) psychological warfare “as a parallel activity that shares some key characteristics with public diplomacy, but which must be managed beyond a rigid curtain of fire”. Nascimento (2012, pp.18-19) describes the components proposed by Cull:

Listening Diplomacy consists of gathering and classifying news about a foreign audience and their opinions, using this data to guide public policies. The data can also be used by traditional diplomacy for intelligence work.

Defense Diplomacy makes use of international communication to promote a public policy, idea or specific interests to foreign audiences.

Cultural Diplomacy is the cultural resources and achievements that are made for knowledge in other nations, facilitating cultural transmission abroad (...)

By Exchange Diplomacy we can understand the sending of citizens abroad and the reciprocal acceptance of foreign citizens for a period of studies and/or acculturation. In this item, the mutuality and reciprocity of experiences where there is a transformation in both parties is taken into account.

In International News Transmission, it uses radio, television and internet technologies to engage with foreign audiences. As examples, we can mention Al Jazeera TV, which aims to show the view of the Middle East, the BBC as an instrument of British public diplomacy, CNN as an American instrument and more recently the Press from TV from Iran, which aims to counterbalance the news that mostly comes from the West.

Public Diplomacy as Psychological Warfare can be defined as the use of communication, by an actor, in times of war with the objective of breaking resistance, facilitating the surrender or dissent of enemies. (BIRTH, 2012, pp. 18-19)

Based on the components proposed by Cull (2009, pp.55-56) below, the topic is analyzed within the scope of the Guideline for Mercosur Communications Policy (Common Mercosur Council Decision (CMC n° 47/2014).

## **GUIDELINE FOR MERCOSUR COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

Mercosur’s institutional structure is defined in article 1 of the Ouro Preto Protocol, from 1994. The decision-making bodies are: the Common Market Council (CMC) is the highest body and is presented through Normative Decisions; the Common Market Group (GMC) is the executive body and its regulations are Resolutions; and the Trade Commission (CCM) which sets the Trade Guidelines. Also noteworthy are the Economic Social Consultative Forum and the Mercosur Administrative Secretariat, although their functions are, respectively, consultative and administrative. The Mercosur Parliament is also a consultative body, however, a Recommendation Project is being processed within the Parliament that modifies it, amending the Constitutive Protocol of the Mercosur Parliament and other related documents, in order to make the Parliament a legislative body.

CMC Decision n° 47, approved in December 2014 during the meeting of ministers that make up the highest body of Mercosur, deals with the Guidelines for the Communication Policy to be adopted by

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3. From the original text: “It begins with a simple taxonomy of the components of public diplomacy, their reciprocal relationship and their respective sources of credibility. These components are: a) listening (the basis of all effective public diplomacy); b) advocacy; c) cultural diplomacy; d) exchange, and e) international broadcasting. This report also identifies f) psychological warfare as a parallel activity that shares some key features with public diplomacy, but must be managed beyond a rigid curtain of fire”. (CULL, 2009, pp.55-56)

the bloc. The proposal was prepared by the Specialized Social Communication Meeting, RECS Mercosul, an institution subordinated to the Common Market Group (GMC), the bloc's executive body. Prior to final approval by the decision-making body, RECS forwarded the project to the GMC as GMC Decision P. No. 10/2014, for consideration by the executive body. After being approved by the executive, the proposal went on for consideration and approval by the higher body.

Freedom of expression and the right to communication and information are treated as human rights according to the Preamble of CMC Decision n°47/2014. It is understood that this document intends to give a new dimension to Mercosur, by including issues that are essential for the debate on strengthening the democratic regime and the regional integration process. As such elements are in the preamble, the aforementioned document does not necessarily guarantee such rights, but defines them as guiding principles of the communication policies to be built.

On the other hand, it is worth highlighting signs of guarantee of the rights to communication and information in the specific objectives of the Guidelines (DECISION CMC n° 47/14). Items 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the specific objectives stand out:

2. To respond to people's needs with communication actions that reflect access to information as a human right [...]

6. To generate agile mechanisms for the circulation of information among institutional actors in order to promote its dissemination.

7. To maintain a stable and dynamic team that guarantees a constant flow of first-hand information and the creation and maintenance of a database of media, opinion leaders, organizations, institutions and social actors.

8. To articulate with the bodies of the MERCOSUR institutional structure linked to the social dimension, with a view to producing and disseminating content.

9. To design mechanisms for the evaluation, measurement and systematization of MERCOSUR communication and public information. (CMC DECISION No. 47/14)

The items above allow an initial view of the intention to build a public communication policy, mainly a policy of transparency and accountability for Mercosur's actions. There is the intention of a formal structure that suggests effectiveness and efficiency through agile mechanisms: a dynamic and cohesive team to maintain the database and circulate information, articulation with other bodies and actors.

This is what Joan Subitats (1994, p.6) means when she points out the need for a decision-making structure for the application of public policy. This relationship between the beneficiaries of the policy and the relevant actors in the construction of the public agenda "within of the formally established structure" allows the following questions<sup>6</sup> (SUBIRATS, 1994, p.6): what is the formal relationship between the actors and the beneficiaries of the policy (means of negotiation, democratic hierarchy, etc.)? ; what are the formal requirements of the agenda-building process? These are objectives that demonstrate the concern of communication in the elaboration of access to information policies, as well as their mechanisms and efficiency, the articulation between the instances and actors linked to the social dimension of integration, and finally, instruments for evaluation and systematization of information and public communication in Mercosur. The document under analysis also suggests the formulation of specific norms in order to later address the issue as a public policy.

The public of these policies is defined according to what was classified as “territorial criteria” (DECISION CMC n° 47/2014), divided into four categories and according to the type of message: massive or focused.

- Massive intraMERCOSUR: citizenship of the MERCOSUR States Parties and mass media.
- Focused intraMERCOSUR: national opinion-forming sectors (academy, social organizations, companies, thematic press, news agencies).
- Massive ExtraMERCOSUR: foreign citizenship, international organizations, massive international media, etc.
- Focused on ExtraMERCOSUR: external opinion-forming sectors (technical government agencies from third countries, academia, social organizations, thematic press). (CMC DECISION No. 47/2014)

Neither the Mercosur documents nor the Communication Policy Guidelines in question do not make explicit the expression public diplomacy, but all publics, whether massive or focused, intra or extra Mercosur, are in the context of the discussion on the practice of public diplomacy, treated as actors in the diplomatic context.

When defining guidelines, actions and instruments of action, the focus is centered on visibility, newsworthiness and Mercosur’s identity. According to the item that defines the guidelines for the bodies and forums of the institutional structure of Mercosur to prepare their communication proposals:

- MERCOSUR’s communication policy will focus on agreements that imply advancing and deepening integration in the region.
- Matters involving States Parties will be communicated with their prior consent.
- The topics under negotiation will be

communicated once concluded. (CMC DECISION No. 47/14)

The above quote includes mechanisms that can be understood as instruments of opacity, preventing knowledge of the positions of each State Party during the negotiations. The issue is at odds with what the MacBride report (1993, p.36) proposes about the role of communication in the context of integration, which is “giving access to individuals, groups and nations, to a diversity of messages that help them to knowing and understanding the views and aspirations of others”<sup>5</sup>. (MACBRIDE et al., 1993, p.36)

Based on the Communication Policy Guideline, Mercosur positions itself to understand communication as a human right and, furthermore, by proposing that Mercosur citizens must feel an integral part and have guaranteed access to information and organizational transparency. Other referrals to the issue are also noted, in other documents, through the proposal that officializes the participation of civil society in the Specialized Meeting of Social Communication (RECS). These questions open the way for the debate on Mercosur communication to gain a more social and less institutional dimension, more participatory, transparent and less opaque.

The approval of the Common Market Council for Decision CMC n°47/14, in December 2014, which defines the Guidelines for Mercosur’s Communications Policy, is considered a step forward, but it is still the beginning for the formulation of communication policies. communication to the block. Discussions are ongoing and communication policy, as well as the role of communication, remain on RECS Mercosur’s agenda. Two issues stand out: the role of communication in the Guidelines

4. From the original text (SUBITATS, 1994, p. 6): “What is the formal relationship between the relevant and affected actors (ways of negotiation, democratic hierarchy...)? the agenda?”

5. Our translation: “Integration: giving access to individuals, groups and nations, to a diversity of messages that help them to know and understand the points of view and the aspirations of others” (MACBRIDE et al., 1993, p.36)

and the creation of a Mercosur Technical Communication Unit (UCIM). In the case of matters under negotiation, the contents of the documents are treated as reserved and must be disclosed only after the conclusion of the negotiation, under the terms agreed in CMC Decision 47/2014. Just as it was previously considered, this mechanism registers the opacity for access to information and positions of each State Party.

The fact is that RECS did not provide more information about the UCIM, but the Mercosur Report n° 19 (BID, 2015, p. 69) highlights the objectives and who initiated the proposal.

Within the framework of the Institutional Analysis Group (GAIM), the Brazilian delegation suggested the advisability of creating a Technical Unit for Social Communication within the framework of the High Representative of MERCOSUR. It is proposed to create a unit that generates information for companies and opinion makers in different countries and follows up on articles that appear in the media. (...)

Subsequently, the May 2014 GMC held in Caracas expressed the need to “advance the MERCOSUR Communications Policy” and instructed RECS to present a working document at the next GMC meeting, considering the proposals made by the Delegations of Uruguay and Venezuela. (IDB, 2015, p.69)

Therefore, the UCIM is an initiative proposed by Brazil, with the objective of producing and disseminating information for specific audiences: companies and opinion makers. The proposal also defines that the unit is under the supervision of the High Representative General (ARGM). He is responsible for political articulation and the formulation of proposals and representation

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6. The Pro Tempore presidency (Latin expression) is the rotating model of Mercosur presidency. Each Member Country presides over the bloc for six months, in alphabetical order (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela). It is observed that Bolivia is in the process of joining the bloc and, while the country's participation is not endorsed in all the National Congresses of the Member Countries, it participates only as an observer.

of the bloc's positions. Among the topics in the ARGM's field of action are health, education, culture and the dissemination of Mercosur.

In June 2015, in Brasília, the RECS delegations took up the subject again, advancing the discussion on the management of the Guidelines for Mercosur Communications Policy. Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay expressed consensus that the direction of MERCOSUR's Communications Policy must be led by the Common Market Group (GMC), in coordination with the MERCOSUR High Representative General (ARGM). At the time, the Delegation of Uruguay was still holding internal consultations on this point. In the second half of 2015, during the Presidency: *Pro-Tempore*<sup>6</sup> of Paraguay, the issue was taken up again in Asuncion. Despite the text in the minutes registering that there have been advances in the discussions on the role of communication, the information remains unavailable.

## CIVIL SOCIETY AT RECS MERCOSUR

Since the RECS is a representative space for the Mercosur Member States to think about and propose questions in the context of the bloc's social communication, it is observed in the documentary records that the demand for civil society participation in the debates is recent. From a philosophical and political point of view, this participation would expand RECS to a public sphere of political function with social participation, in the terms of Jürgen Habermas.

With the emergence of a social sphere, whose regulation public opinion disputes with the public power, the theme of the

modern public sphere, in comparison with the old one, shifted from the properly political tasks of a community of citizens acting together (jurisdiction internally, self-affirmation before the external sphere) for the more properly civil tasks of a society that publicly debates (to guarantee the exchange of goods). (HABERMAS, 2003)

The discussion on the participation of civil society representatives in RECS Mercosul was revived in early 2015, at the meeting in Brasília. The topic was discussed previously, in 2011, in Asunción, Paraguay. At the Brasilia meeting, Argentina proposed the effective participation of civil society in RECS, but Brazil and Paraguay expressed the need for internal consultations. There is a certain resistance on the subject, which becomes clearer when the rules of participation are defined. The delegation of Uruguay did not comment on this point.

In Brasilia, in June 2015, the delegations present (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) examined the document with the rules for civil society participation in RECS. The document was prepared based on the Argentine proposal for the effective participation of Civil Society in the meetings of the instance, considering the terms discussed in Asunción, in June 2011. The proposal is still under internal consultation in the Member Countries. Bolivia, in the process of accession, continues to participate as an observer. Venezuela did not send a delegation and, in this case, the Minutes were signed.

The matter received comments at the third meeting of 2015, in Asunción, but there was no progress. Of the rules for civil society participation in the Mercosur Social Communication Specialized Meeting (RECS) meetings, the following stand out: one representative per country, who is a member of the Communication Commission of the Mercosur Social Summit; each country

must inform the Pro-Tempore Presidency of the name of the civil society representative to be a member of the RECS delegation; A specific point regarding the participation of representatives of civil society will be discussed at a meeting, preferably as the first item on the agenda, and each member of civil society will have up to 15 minutes to present their positions. After their presentations, the participation of civil society members is limited to observation only.

Although there are currently no restrictions on the presence of people outside the delegations as observers of the debate, there is no opening for the public. Regarding the participation of civil society, the limit of members and the bureaucratic conditions that this limitation may imply, there will not be much space for civil society, and the institutionalization of these rules signals that there is no practical application of the concept of public diplomacy in RECS.

Although, other institutional instances of Mercosur promote social participation, such as the Social Participation Unit (UPS), the Economic and Social Consultative Forum (FCES); the results of the events promoted by such institutions do not seem to provoke effective results, remaining only in the sphere of discourses. This question, already discussed by other researchers, implies the democratic deficit rooted in the structure of Mercosur. For Elisa Ribeiro (2012), this deficit is in the institutional structure of Mercosur, which she observes to be an inefficient and ineffective structure for the participation of national and regional parliaments in the bloc's decision-making process, which is added to the lack of effectiveness of the social demands. According to Ribeiro (2012, p. 14), "[...] the institutional structure of the bloc is able to be democratic and representative, however, in practice, it does not work properly". The researcher's diagnosis for the



question is that it is the governments' desire to maintain the structure as it is that causes this deficit, so that the current decision-making model centered on the rulers remains.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As we finish this text, analysts are focusing on the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, a process that became known as Brexit. Through a plebiscite, British citizens opted to leave the European Union. In the context of Mercosur, Brazil debates the impeachment of President Dilma Roussef and the interim government of President Michel Temer, with a speech focused on privatization and reduction of State interference in the economy. At the same time, another Mercosur member country, Venezuela, is in a state of economic emergency and under the crosshairs of the opposition that is campaigning for the departure of President Nicolás Maduro. In the second half of 2016, Venezuela is expected to assume the Pro Tempore presidency of the bloc, but faces distrust on the part of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay, regarding the breach of the democratic clause provided for in the Ushuaia Protocol (1998). It is not the place here to discuss what consequences these two processes may have on the European Union and Mercosur, respectively. These are processes that are too recent and still in progress, not to mention that they are not the focus of this research. We note here, just to recognize that they intend public diplomacy and international relations and highlight one of the main conflicts of regional integration blocs: how to feel like a citizen of a regional integration bloc without giving up national citizenship? At this point, TELES (2013), when dealing with public diplomacy in international organizations (IO), perceives the relevance of public opinion to the internal issues of countries and its influence on international organizations.

The perception of externalities or negative consequences of interdependence can lead to the emergence of more defensive and nationalist positions on the part of the most disadvantaged States, leading to the emergence of internal tendencies in favor of the birth of inward-facing national welfare states and little sensitive to international cooperation. In this context, transnational social policies such as cooperation and development, safeguarding peace and security, among others, in developing countries serve to influence local public opinion to take a favorable position in relation to IO. (TELES, 2013, p.53)

It is the cyclical issues that allow us to think about regional integration from the point of view of public opinion, and what consequences will this opinion bring to the future of global relations: weakening, strengthening or reformulation? Public policy on communication in diplomatic relations plays a fundamental role in engaging with public opinion for the development of regional integration between the countries of a bloc, in this case, Mercosur.

Based on the six classifications of public diplomacy proposed by Cull (2009, pp. 55-56) - listening diplomacy, defense, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, international news broadcasting and psychological warfare - when analyzing the Policy Guidelines Communication of Mercosur (CMC Decision 47/2014), as well as the minutes of the RECS Mercosur meetings, we identified that there are difficulties in the international transmission of news and in listening, which, in our view, dialogues with the low participation of civil society in debates and RECS decisions. From the point of view of cultural diplomacy, we believe that the advances are greater, with strong cultural exchange between Mercosur member countries.

Public diplomacy is not explicit as a Mercosur public policy. The Communication Policy Guideline (CMC Decision No.

47/2014) brings several elements that are understood from the concepts of public diplomacy. However, the role of the media in Mercosur is not defined and, in terms of the Directive, the right to communication

and information are only guiding premises in the formulation of policies. Finally, social participation is still a matter to be addressed in reserved documents and in the secrecy of negotiations.

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