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Language Policy and the Status of Russian in the Soviet Union and the Successor States outside the Russian Federation

The Bolshevik policy towards the minority nationalities after the Revolution, *korenizatsiia* (nativization), was designed to unite all the nations of the USSR into a single socialist community with a uniform national culture. One aspect of this was the language policy, implemented by *Narkomnats*, established in 1917 to serve as an intermediary between the central Soviet organs and address such problems as standardizing each local language, spreading it as the common language of communication within the population, changing the lexicon to meet the needs of a modern industrial society, increasing literacy and creating new alphabets.

The creation of new alphabets for the languages of Central Asia passed through several phases. Before 1917, the Turkic peoples of Central Asia used the Arabic alphabet, a symbol of religious and cultural ties with other Turkic peoples and with the Islamic world, including Turkey, at that time a conduit for both Islamic thought and European political ideas.

Following the revolution, Soviet authorities introduced a modified Arabic alphabet as the standard script for writing Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Turkmen (Bacon 1966, 190). However in 1925, this policy was reversed, and all materials printed in the Arabic script were banned. Instead, the use of the Latin alphabet for these languages was proposed at the Baku Turkological Congress in 1926. This proposal was accepted, and between 1927 and 1930 the Latin alphabet was adopted for all five languages, one aspect of their separation from Islam and from Perso-Arabic culture.

In the mid-1930s, as Russian was becoming the predominant language of the USSR, the Latin alphabet was seen as an obstacle to learning Russian. In addition, Soviet authorities feared that a new Pan-Turkic literature written in the Latin alphabet could draw the Turks of Central Asia towards Turkey, which had also adopted the Latin alphabet (Bacon 191; Laitin 1998, 49-52). Thus, between 1938 and 1940, the Latin alphabet was abandoned in favour of the Cyrillic script throughout Central Asia, while the teaching of the Russian

language was made compulsory in all non-Russian schools across the Soviet Union in 1938.

As part of this process of linguistic integration, a number of reforms were implemented to bring the languages of Central Asia closer to Russian. Numerous Russian loan words and new grammatical structures were introduced with the Cyrillic alphabet. Though many of the borrowed words came from Russian, there were also international terms, such as *telefon* and *telegram*, which the Russians had adopted during their own process of industrialization. In some cases native vocabulary was replaced by Russian words, while in others native and loan words coexisted with some differentiation in meaning. For example, in Tajik the word *majlis* was kept for the general sense of ‘assembly’ and the Russian *soviet* was used only for Soviet councils. In addition, loan words were modified according to the grammatical system of the recipient language: for example, again in Tajik, the negative adjective, *bepartiavi*, ‘non-Party’ was formed from the Russian noun *partii* by means of a prefix and a suffix (Bacon, 200). The adoption of Russian loan words had a profound impact on the vocabulary of the Central Asian languages. The percentage of Arabic and Persian words in Uzbek-language newspapers fell from 37% in 1923 to 25% in 1940, while the percentage of Russian words rose from 2% to 15% (Conquest 1967, 76). On the other hand, it could be argued that the introduction of these Russian words was a source of linguistic enrichment.

The end result of the Soviets’ efforts to spread the Russian language can be shown in the following table of the overall knowledge of Russian in the republics in 1989:

Table 1.

Republic	Major groups	%	Knowledge of Russian % (claim as native language/claim fluency)
¹ *Armenia	Armenians	93	45 (0.3/44.3)
	Azeris	3	19
Azerbaijan	Azeris	83	32 (0.4/31.)
	Russians	6	-

¹ (*) designates the republics in which the majority is Slavic or non-Muslim.

	Armenians	6	69
*Belarus	Belorussians	78	80 (19.7/60.4)
	Russians	13	-
*Estonia	Estonians	62	35 (1.0/33.6)
	Russians	30	-
*Georgia	Georgians	70	32 (0.2/31.8)
	Armenians	8	52
	Russians	6	-
	Azeris	6	35
Kazakhstan	Kazakhs	40	64 (1.4/62.8)
	Russians	38	-
Kyrgyzstan	Kyrgyz	52	37 (0.3/36.9)
	Russians	22	-
	Uzbeks	13	39
*Latvia	Latvians	52	68 (2.6/65.7)
	Russians	34	-
*Lithuania	Lithuanians	80	38 (0.3/37.4)
	Russians	9	-
	Poles	7	67
*Moldova	Moldovans	65	58 (4.3/53.3)
	Ukrainians	14	80
	Russians	13	-
Tajikistan	Tajiks	62	31 (0.5/30)
	Uzbeks	24	22
	Russians	8	-
Turkmenistan	Turkmens	72	28 (0.7/2.2)
	Russians	10	-
	Uzbeks	9	29
*Ukraine	Ukrainians	73	72 (12.2/59.5)
	Russians	22	-
Uzbekistan	Uzbeks	71	27 (0.4/22.7)
	Russians	8	²

² From <http://cultura.gencat.es/llengcat/noves> (This table also included the level of the knowledge of a titular language which was not included here.) The criteria on which

As can be seen, the results of the Russian language-teaching policy varied from republic to republic. Russification was more successful in areas that were predominantly Slavic or non-Muslim in origin. The exception, Kazakhstan, is not surprising considering the large number of Slavs who had emigrated there. In general, however, the number of people in the Central Asian nations who acquired Russian as a second language remained rather low. It seems that either Soviet language policy was not as harsh as has been sometimes claimed, or that it was not overly successful.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union came social disintegration and the emergence of new states; Russians and the other peoples of the former Soviet Union had to create a new concept of national identity. Almost 25 million ethnic Russians became foreign citizens in the republics they considered their homeland, while the newly independent states were confronted with the task of establishing their own national identities. In this process language became a key factor. The new states all passed language laws in 1989-1990 making their titular language the official language and requiring all activities to be conducted in it.³

The former Soviet republics have adopted very different attitudes and policies toward Russian and its role in their countries in the years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Turkmenistan, the last republic to proclaim its state language (in 1990), adopted a Turkmen Latin alphabet in 1993, and has attempted to put its national language on a par with Russian as an international language.⁴ The number of schools conducting classes in Russian has decreased by 71%, and instruction in Russian was scheduled to end in 2002 (Blagov 2003).

The language law adopted by Uzbekistan in 1995 recognises the Uzbek language as the state language, though implementation of the law has been

these determinations were based were not indicated. However, from personal observation, I believe that knowledge of Russian is more widespread than these figures may indicate. Even in remote villages the residents often have at least basic knowledge of Russian.

³ The Russian Federation was the last of the 15 states that had made up the Soviet Union to pass a law on the state language in 1990 (Viytez, 24). For a discussion of language policy and language laws in the Russian Federation see Viytez.

⁴ From <http://www.unesco.org/most/v13n2schlyter.htm>

somewhat slow, except in the symbolic areas of renaming streets and neighbourhoods (Fierman 1995, 583). Two new Latin alphabets were adopted for Uzbek, one in 1993 and the other 1995, but neither can be regarded as an improvement on the former Cyrillic alphabet. Another problem for Uzbekistan is that within its borders lies the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, whose local dialect is much closer to Kazakh than to Uzbek. If this language is to have its script conform to that of any other language, it should be Kazakh, not Uzbek. However, since there has been no independent Karakalpak language policy to date, it seems that the solution of this issue will depend on whether the Kazakhs adopt the Latin alphabet.

The status of ethnic Russians living in Uzbekistan has been another source of contention. Russians had been the privileged group under the communist system, but they have lost their privileged status, and the language law adopted in 1995 does not guarantee the free use of the Russian language as a language of international communication. In addition, the new citizenship law considers all those who did not adopt Uzbek citizenship by 1 July 1993 as foreigners, and non-citizens are denied access to health care and education. As a result, many Russian-speakers have left Uzbekistan.

Kazakhstan's constitution, adopted in 1995, designates Kazakh as the state language, while recognizing Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication and guaranteeing its equal use in the government and media. At present, Kazakh language proficiency is required only of the highest state officials, while the remaining state personnel have been given a 15-year grace period to learn Kazakh. Despite support from the government, Kazakh remains the language of the poor and the marginalized. The Kazakh government continues to seek a way to promote the Kazakh language without alienating a large Russian minority (approximately 38% of the population). A considerable segment of the Russian population in Kazakhstan has continued to urge the recognition of Russian not just as a language for interethnic communication, but as a second official language. The leadership of the Slavonic Public Movement *Lad* sees language as the central issue, and argues that Kazakh cannot serve as a language of modern politics, science and education and has

never been a language of high culture.⁵ Such statements have, naturally, antagonized Kazakh nationalists. They blame the government for not showing enough determination to make Kazakh the state language, pointing out that Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian republic which has not proceeded with its announced plan to transition to the Latin alphabet.⁶ This lack of decision also has a direct bearing on the resolution of the language issue in neighbouring Karakalpakistan.

In Tajikistan the new constitution adopted in 1994 declares Tajik to be the state language, yet Russian is recognised as a language of inter-ethnic communication and its use is permitted in all spheres of social life. In fact, all ethnic groups are free to use their own native languages.⁷ Tajikistan has a large Uzbek population and a language law was passed in 1989 allowing the use and teaching of Uzbek. Tajik law also guarantees all citizens the freedom to obtain general secondary education in either the Tajik, Russian or Uzbek languages.⁸ In addition, Tajik-Russian bilingualism is strongly encouraged in Tajikistan.

In Azerbaijan the law on the state language was adopted in 1995. Since 1 August 2001, the official alphabet has been the Latin alphabet. All official documents, books, press and media use the state language. The language of education is also Azerbaijani, although education in minority languages is permitted based on the needs of the citizenry and in conformity with the laws of the country. A new law requiring that all government business be transacted in Azerbaijani was passed in 2002 by the Milli Mezhlis.⁹ According to Vilayat Guliyev, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the government is not against the use of the Russian language, but there is no question of according it the status of an official language.¹⁰ Seventeen public and private colleges in Baku have Russian departments, and rumours of plans to close Russian language schools have been officially denied. There are about 50,000 ethnic Russians in Azerbaijan, as well as other minorities such as Turks, Georgians, Talysh,

⁵ Up until the twentieth century the languages of culture in this region were Persian and Chaghatay Turkish.

⁶ <http://www.cacaianalyst.org>.

⁷ <http://www.usefoundation.org>.

⁸ <http://www.usefoundation.org>.

⁹ <http://lists.delfi.lv/pipermail/minelres/>.

¹⁰ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/multiethnic/message/2853>.

Armenians, Jews and Ukrainians who speak Russian at home and at work. Russian-speakers constitute more than two million people out of Azerbaijan's total population of almost 8 million.¹¹ The mass media in Azerbaijan use the state language, but any citizen has the right to establish a media outlet in any of the other languages spoken in the republic.

Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian republic to have granted the Russian language official status through a law passed in May 2000 (Landau 2001, 120). The new constitution, amended in 1996, recognises Russian as a language for inter-ethnic communication.¹² The Kyrgyz parliament will pass a new language law which requires state officials to know Kyrgyz well enough to perform their jobs and mandates the use of Kyrgyz in education and mass media. Under the current law both Kyrgyz and Russian have official status, and on 18 February 2004 State Secretary Osmonakun Ibraimov told journalists that Russian remains the *de facto* official language for meetings and documents at high levels of government.¹³ President Askar Akaev, addressing a three-day international congress on the Russian language in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) held in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek in 2004, declared that the development of the Russian language was not only an economic priority, but also an important political task for Kyrgyzstan,¹⁴ and emphasized that Russian as a language of inter-ethnic and international communication would always serve as a bridge in Kyrgyzstan's relations with Moscow.¹⁵ Currently Russian is the language of approximately 100 newspapers and several large TV channels and radio stations in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁶

In Moldova the situation is quite different. The language laws adopted in August and September 1989 declared Moldovan the state language, Gagauz Turkish the second state language in those areas where the Gagauz formed a majority, and Russian the language of interethnic communication (Kolstoe 1995, 147-8; Nissler n.d.). In addition, the Cyrillic script was abandoned in

¹¹ <http://lists.delfi.lv/pipermail/minelres/>.

¹² <http://www.usefoundation.org>.

¹³ Reported in *The Times of Central Asia*, 23 Feb 2004.

¹⁴ Reported in *The Times of Central Asia*, 12 March 2004.

¹⁵ Reported by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2004.

¹⁶ Reported in *The Times of Central Asia*, 12 March 2004.

favour of the former Latin script. The teaching of Russian as an obligatory subject in Moldovan schools has been hotly debated, one member of parliament warning against the reintroduction of compulsory Russian: 'For decades we couldn't even think in our own language. If Russian were to somehow become official again, other Soviet habits would start to creep back' (Kolstoe 147-8). Without making a final decision, in 2002 the Moldovan government placed a moratorium on the obligatory study of Russian in schools (Artiukov 2002). One result of these measures and attitudes was the attempt of the majority-Russian Trans-Dniestr region to break away from Moldova in 1990. This region adopted three 'official languages' – Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan written in Cyrillic. Although a cease-fire was arranged in 1992, tensions still persist in this area (Kolstoe 157-60).

As for the status of Russian in the Baltic republics, in Latvia all Russian schools are due to be shut down by government order and the Russian language has been replaced by Latvian. The measures taken have been so harsh that one Latvian student from Riga sent a letter to Vladimir Putin to ask for help in receiving an education in Russian. Putin's reply sheds considerable light on his attitude towards this issue: 'The Russian language will remain in Latvia in the future.'¹⁷ One Russian-speaking woman from Latvia was prevented from standing in parliamentary elections on the grounds that she did not know Latvian; she took legal action and later won her case in the European Court of Human Rights.¹⁸

In 1989 Estonia passed a law recognising Estonian as the sole official language of the republic. All state employees, as well as medical doctors, journalists, and merchants are required to know it. Any non-Estonian speaker already holding one of these positions was given a four-year grace period to learn the language. In 1993 further legislation required all non-Estonian television broadcasts to be subtitled, a measure seen as an attempt to keep Russian broadcasts off the air. In addition, the same legislation called for the phasing out of Russian-language secondary education by the year 2000 (Kolstoe 112; Laitin 89, 354). Estonia will completely ban Russian as a language of instruction in 2007, and has already ceased using Russian in

¹⁷ From <http://www.atimes.com>.

¹⁸ From http://www.pravapis.org/art_no_russian.afp.

higher education. In response to demands that Russian be given official status, President Arnold Rjute has stated that his nation is unlikely to make Russian a second state language.¹⁹

In Lithuania the law on the state language was adopted in 1995. With the smallest ethnic Russian population of any Baltic state, Lithuania has few problems with its Russian residents. The rights of ethnic groups are guaranteed under the law and Russians enjoy full freedom in social, cultural and linguistic matters. Although Russian schools are state-funded, the law requires that Lithuanian language and literature courses be taught in Lithuanian. As a result, Lithuania has earned the reputation of being the most liberal of the Baltic states vis-à-vis its Russian minority.²⁰

Ukraine's constitution, adopted in 1996, recognises Ukrainian as the state language. The Law on National Minorities adopted in 1992 guarantees minorities the right to use and obtain an education in their native language. Nonetheless, there have been claims that the use of Ukrainian in the media and schools is on the rise, and some Russian organizations have complained that the requirement to take a Ukrainian language test puts them at a disadvantage in academic entrance exams.²¹ According to the Russian Movement of Ukraine, 1,300 schools have changed their language of instruction from Russian to Ukrainian,²² and disagreements over the use of Russian have cast a shadow over Russian-Ukrainian relations. One report suggests that 'there are only 10 Russian schools left in Kiev now, compared with 170 a decade ago'.²³

Beginning in 2004, the country's broadcasting authorities introduced the mandatory use of Ukrainian in national television and radio news reports. The move, severely criticized by Russia, also created an uproar among public and human rights groups.²⁴ In a recent television programme broadcast from Kiev on the Russian Channel 1, one Ukrainian declared that he knew nothing about Pushkin, because he was a 'foreign writer' and his works were considered 'foreign literature'. This took place in front of Pushkin's statue in Kiev and

¹⁹ <http://www.infohouse.us>

²⁰ <http://www.usefoundation.org>

²¹ <http://www.usefoundation.org>

²² <http://www.usefoundation.org>

²³ See <http://www.infohouse.us>

²⁴ See <http://www.mosnews.com/interview/2204/06/02/yushchenko.shtml>.

gives some indication of how quickly Ukraine has tried to distance itself from Russia. At the same time, Leonid Grach, a deputy in the Ukrainian parliament, has proposed an amendment to the Ukrainian constitution to make Russian an official language alongside Ukrainian, and the head of the Moscow-based Institute of Humanitarian and Political Studies, Vyacheslav Igrunov, reports that even 10 years after gaining independence the majority of books published in Ukraine are still in Russian.²⁵ Recently, the Ukrainian parliament passed a bill granting Russian official status.²⁶

The new Belarus constitution, adopted in 1996, guarantees the citizens of the country the right to use their own language and to choose the language of communication. Among the Slavic-speaking states, only Belarus (like Kyrgyzstan) has granted the Russian language official status, and Russian remains the predominant language in most areas of public life, among them government, trade, publishing and the media.²⁷

As for the republics of the Caucasus, Georgia adopted its language law in 1995. This law recognises two official languages; the state language is Georgian in Georgia, and Abkhazian in the region of Abkhazia. Regardless of their ethnic background, language and/or religion, all citizens of Georgia have the right to use their languages in private and public life without restriction. The language of the media conforms to language law – Georgian in Georgia, Abkhazian in Abkhazia. However, minorities have the right to obtain information in their own language and up to ten per cent of total broadcasting time in another language is allowed.²⁸ As for the Russian language in Georgia, it remains in common use among the minorities, and communication between some regions and the central authorities is still conducted in Russian.²⁹

In Armenia the language law was adopted in 1993. According to this law Armenian is the sole official language of Armenia and serves in all areas of national life. All state institutions, organizations and officials are required to use Armenian, and broadcasting must also be conducted in Armenian.

²⁵ Sourced from <http://www.mosnews.com/interview/2204/06/02/yushchenko.shtml>.

²⁶ Sourced from <http://www.mosnews.com/interview/2204/06/02/yushchenko.shtml>.

²⁷ <http://www.usefoundation.org>.

²⁸ <http://www.ivir.nl/publications/mcgonagle/Minority-language%20broadcasting.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.usefoundation.org>

However, this requirement is not applicable to broadcasting in minority languages. State law guarantees that minorities will not be denied access to the mass media and that they have the right to establish their own mass media.³⁰ Publishing and study in minority languages is also permitted under the language law; however, in the field of education the government has devoted minimal resources to maintaining minority-language schools. As a result, the number of Russian language schools has decreased dramatically in Armenia since independence.³¹

Conclusions: The Future of the Russian Language in the Former Soviet Republics

The future of the Russian language in the former Soviet republics will depend on a number of factors, both internal and external. Among the internal factors are demographics, the views of the national governments on the role of Russian in their countries, the foreign policy orientation of these countries, and the general attitude of the citizenry towards Russian. External factors that could influence the continued use of Russian in the FSU are the Russian economy and the level of support the Russian government provides for the study of Russian and Russian education programmes throughout the CIS.

The first internal factor to be considered is the demographic makeup of the country, and in particular the ratio of the titular nationality to Russians and other minorities within the country. As Russians during the Soviet era generally did not bother to learn the titular language, and minorities, too, generally learned Russian rather than the titular language as their means of interethnic communication, the existence of sizable Russian and minority communities within a country could be an indicator of the degree of potential support for the continued use of Russian.

³⁰ <http://www.ivir.nl/publications/mcgonagle/Minority-language%20broadcasting.pdf>

³¹ <http://www.usefoundation.org>

Table 2. Population of Titular Nationality/Russians/Other (%)

	1989	2004 (est.) ³²
Caucasus		
Armenia	93.3/1.6/5.1	93.0/2.0/5.0
Azerbaijan	82.7/5.6/11.7	90.0/2.5/7.5
Georgia	70.1/6.3/23.6	70.1/6.3/23.6
Baltic Republics		
Estonia	61.5/30.3/8.2	65.3/28.1/6.6
Latvia	51.8/34.0/14.2	57.7/29.6/12.7
Lithuania	76.9/9.4/11.0	80.6/8.7/10.7
Central Asia		
Kazakhstan	39.7/37.8/22.5	53.4/30.0/16.6 ³³
Kyrgyzstan	52.3/21.5/26.2	64.9/12.5/22.6
Tajikistan	62.3/7.6/30.1	64.9/3.5/31.6
Turkmenistan	72.0/9.5/18.5	85.0/4.0/11.0
Uzbekistan	71.4/8.3/20.3	80.0/5.5/14.5
Others		
Belarus	77.9/13.2/8.9	81.2/11.4/7.4
Moldova	64.5/13.0/22.5	64.5/13.0/22.5
Ukraine	72.7/22.1/5.2	77.8/17.3/4.9

Except for Armenia, which shows a very slight increase in the percentage of Russians in the population, and Georgia and Moldova, where there is no apparent change in the makeup of the population, the general trend for the majority of former Soviet republics is clear: an increase in the proportion of the titular nationality and a continued decline in the proportion of Russians and other ethnic groups in the total population. One possible result of this trend could be that the language of the titular nationality will make its influence increasingly felt among the Russians and other minorities living in these countries. This possibility would seem to be even higher in those republics (such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan,

³² 2004 figures taken from www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos under the entries for each country.

³³ 1999 census reported in <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kz.html>

and Uzbekistan) where the percentage of Russians and other minorities is relatively low. Conversely, in countries where there is a relatively higher percentage of Russians and other ethnic groups (such as Estonia, Latvia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine), it might be expected that the demand to put Russian on a level equal with the titular language would be higher. However, in reality, the situation is more complex.

To begin with with the Baltic republics, a mixed picture emerges on the future of the Russian language in this region. As previously discussed, Estonia has passed rather strict laws on language, education and citizenship at the expense of Russian. The President of Estonia has dismissed the suggestion that Russian will become a second official language as 'an unreal situation.'³⁴ In addition, Estonia's foreign policy is clearly oriented towards the West, as shown by its membership in NATO and the EU, rather than towards Moscow. Despite the fact that Russians and other ethnic groups still make up over 30% of Estonia's population, the future of Russian in Estonia seems bleak. Official pressure combined with the incentives to learn Estonian (citizenship and better jobs) will most likely lead to the continued decline of Russian (Laitin 349).

The situation in Latvia is similar, both demographically and legally. Here, too, Russians and other minorities comprise over 30% of the population and the Latvian government has adopted measures to promote the titular language and deny official recognition to any other. These measures have even extended since 2001 to legal sanctions against those who neglect or show disrespect toward the state language.³⁵ Likewise, the Latvian government has followed a very pro-Western policy and joined both NATO and the EU at the earliest opportunity. Russian-speakers in Latvia will be under pressure to assimilate into the national culture if they wish to participate in the nation's political and economic life. Under such conditions it is unlikely that Russian will continue to be a language of major importance in Latvia.

In Lithuania the situation is somewhat different. Both during the Soviet era and since independence, Russians and other minorities have formed just under 20% of Lithuania's population. Perhaps as a result, there has been less of a sense that Lithuanian language and culture are under threat and require strict

³⁴ <http://www.infohouse.us> 13.02.2003.

³⁵ <http://www.gazeta.kg> 2.08.2003.

legal protection. Like its neighbours, Lithuania has followed a consistently Western-oriented foreign policy, joining the same international bodies (NATO and the EU) as Estonia and Latvia. Despite a comparatively more liberal language policy, the limited size of the Russian community and the economic benefits of knowing the national language could both work toward assimilation. As a result, the future of Russian in Lithuania is uncertain at best.

There are two other factors common to all three Baltic republics which impact on the future of the Russian language. The first is that none of the governments of these countries see any great benefit, internal or external, to be gained from supporting Russian. Consequently, there is no incentive for them to grant any official status or recognition to the Russian language. The second factor is the attitude of the local Russian communities to the language and culture of their country of residence. Assimilation into the national cultures of European countries represents a much easier cultural and linguistic shift than is the case in other regions of the former Soviet Union.

The future of the Russian language in the three republics in the south Caucasus – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – is less negative than in the Baltic republics for a number of reasons. In Georgia, despite ethnic Russians making up only around 9% of the country's total population, approximately another 20% consists of various minorities who had little or no incentive to learn Georgian during the Soviet era. Since independence, Georgia's unstable conditions (internal power struggles, poor economy and separatist tendencies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) cannot have been conducive to the spread of Georgian among the minorities. This would leave Russian, as in the Soviet era, as the most likely medium for interethnic communication. In addition, despite the Georgian government's disagreements with Moscow and attempts to move closer to the West, Russia remains a powerful neighbour with whom the Georgians will continue to have frequent contact. This could be another incentive to maintain the knowledge of Russian inherited from the Soviet period. A final factor working in favour of Russian in Georgia is the fact that it is also an established regional lingua franca in dealings with the neighbouring states of Armenia and Azerbaijan. This obviously facilitates regional cooperation in the areas of trade, security and development. To sum up, despite the changes that have come about since independence in Georgia, there are a number of factors which might favour the continued use of Russian in Georgia.

Demographically, Armenia presents a very different picture, remaining, as in the Soviet era, the most ethnically homogenous republic, with approximately 93% of the population consisting of Armenians. Russians make up only around 2% of the population according to 2004 estimates. Thus, unlike Georgia, Armenia does not have the issue of a common language for interethnic communication, although Russian is an established means of communication with two of Armenia's neighbours. In addition, although Armenia does not share a border with Russia, it has maintained ties with Russia, especially in the area of military cooperation. These two factors should help to keep Russian an important language in Armenia in the future.

As in Armenia, in Azerbaijan the titular nationality forms the overwhelming majority of the population, approximately 90%. Despite this, the status of Russian in Azerbaijan appears to be more secure than in any of the other Caucasian republics. Despite the influx of Westerners in connection with the oil and gas industries, Azerbaijan has maintained good relations with its neighbour to the north. As previously mentioned, the Azeri government has adopted a very moderate attitude regarding the use of Russian in education. In addition, official Azeri television channels still broadcast news programmes and some films in Russian.³⁶ These factors, combined with the use of Russian for regional communication, all indicate that Russian is likely to maintain a vital presence in Azerbaijan for the foreseeable future.

The prospects for Russian in the five Central Asian states vary from republic to republic. In Turkmenistan, the future of Russian is not entirely clear. While it remains a language of instruction in many educational institutions, there is a continued effort to increase the role of the Turkmen language in all areas of public life. In addition there are even indications that Turkmenistan is attempting to move towards a three-language policy of Turkmen, Russian and a third language such as French, German or English (Landau 2001, 189-193). As in the Caucasus, Russian remains a means of communication with many of Turkmenistan's neighbours, a fact which favours its survival in the country, although Turkmenistan has pursued a more independent and isolationist international policy. Relations with Russia are not close when compared to some of the other Central Asian republics, nor has

³⁶Based on personal observation.

Turkmenistan attempted to align itself more closely with the West. In short, in the near future Russian will continue to have a role in the life of Turkmenistan, particularly in the field of higher education, but the extent of its role in other areas is unclear.

Although in Uzbekistan the Uzbeks make up 80% of the population and Russians just over 5%, Russian still retains a very important place. For example, in the education system, Russian is the most widely-used language after Uzbek. Recently, however, Russian has been losing ground in educational institutions both to Uzbek and to other foreign languages, especially English (Landau 173-178). In addition to these developments, in the area of international policy Uzbekistan, while not wishing to sever ties with Russia, has moved to align itself with the West. This is a trend that has accelerated since the events of 11 September 2001, and closer relations with the United States, combined with an increased American presence in Uzbekistan as well as other parts of Central Asia, could be an incentive to study English rather than Russian. On the other hand, Russian is still used for regional communication with the other former Soviet republics in the region, a factor in favour of its continued use and study. A survey of students conducted in 2002 in Uzbekistan's two largest cities, Tashkent and Samarkand, indicates that Russian continues to be important in the lives of young Uzbeks. When asked which language they used in their professional lives, 41.2% of those responding in Tashkent said 'only Russian'. A slightly smaller number, 41.0% responded 'Russian and Uzbek'. Only 7.4% answered 'Uzbek only'. The statistics from respondents in Samarkand showed a slight drop in the percentages for 'Russian only', and 'Russian and Uzbek', and a slight increase for 'Uzbek only' at 39.0%, 38.0% and 11.0% respectively.³⁷ These figures indicate that, as in Turkmenistan, the Russian language will certainly have a place in Uzbek life for the near future, but its long-term prospects may be less certain.

The future of Russian in the remaining three Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, is perhaps more assured than in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, although the reasons for this differ from country to country. Despite the steps taken by the Kazakh government to increase

³⁷ <http://www.gazeta.kg> 2.08.2003.

knowledge and use of the state language, the country's large Russian community combined with the extremely widespread knowledge of Russian among all ethnic groups (up to 95%)³⁸ virtually ensures that Russian will continue to play a vital role. In addition, although Kazakhstan has increased ties to the West, particularly in the fields of energy and regional security, it retains very close connections with Russia.

Kyrgyzstan, like Kazakhstan, has attempted with varying degrees of success to increase the role of the Kyrgyz language. However, although the percentage of Russians in Kyrgyzstan is less than half that of Kazakhstan, Russian is an official language. This, taken together with the country's continued close ties to Russia,³⁹ is virtual guarantee of the long-term survival of Russian.

Tajikistan has the smallest number of Russians of any of the Central Asian republics, and the number continues to decline due to emigration. Nonetheless, Russian remains the language of interethnic communication and Russia maintains a relatively strong military presence in the country, especially along the Afghan border (Jonson 2004, 107-8). As a result, while Russian will undoubtedly continue to play a role in the life of the state in the near future; its survival over time will depend on relations with Russia and the continued existence of institutions such as the Slavonic State University in Dushanbe, opened in 1996.

Also relevant to the situation in the Central Asian republics is the attitude of the Russians living there towards learning the titular languages and adapting to the new societies they find themselves in. To many Russians the religious and cultural differences between Slavs and Muslims are insurmountable, and they feel little inclination to assimilate into what they see as an alien and, often, inferior culture. By not assimilating, as may happen in the Baltics, they will continue to form a Russian-speaking bloc in the region, though they may,

³⁸ 2001 estimate; www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kz.html

³⁹ Despite the Kyrgyz government granting the United States limited rights to station military personnel in its territory prior to the 2001 war in Afghanistan, ties with Russia remain close. One example is the new air base that Russia opened in Kyrgyzstan in 2003, Russia's only airbase outside its territory. See: 'Russia opens Kyrgyzstan Base', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/3206385.stm>

out of necessity, learn the titular language to a greater extent than in the Soviet period (Landau 211).

In Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine, the future of the Russian language appears to be secure, though the conditions under which it will continue in these republics differ greatly. In Moldova, the number of Russian speakers and Moldovan speakers in the republic was approximately equal in 1989 (Kolstoe 145-6). Since population statistics from 1989 and 2004 indicate no apparent change in the ethnic makeup of the republic, it can be assumed that there has also been no appreciable change in the linguistic picture either. Thus, despite the political turmoil that has beset the republic since independence and the previously mentioned language laws, Russian looks to remain a significant language in Moldova well into the future.

Belarus has historically been under strong cultural influence from Russia since Tsarist times, and even today maintains very close relations with Russia. As a result, knowledge of Russian remains widespread in the country; in 1989 82.6% of the population, at a time when just over 13% of the population was composed of ethnic Russians, claimed fluency in Russian as either their first or second language (Kolstoe 168). Since 1989 there has been only a slight change in the ethnic composition of the population; therefore, it is unlikely that the number of those knowing Russian has changed significantly. Belarus's close ties to Russia, the generally harmonious relations between Russian speakers and speakers of Belarusian, and Russian's status as an official language are strong indicators that Russian will continue to have an important place in Belarus.

Ukraine, like Belarus, has very long historical links to Russia and is home to Russian communities whose roots go back hundreds of years. Here, too, the future of the Russian language appears to be secure. One indication is the high percentage of those who use Russian in Ukraine; statistics reported in 2003 indicate that 55% of Ukrainians use Russian in their daily lives, a figure that jumps to 75% in the Donetsk region.⁴⁰ Politically, Ukraine has maintained relatively good relations with Moscow, though as the most recent elections demonstrated, they are not entirely without problems. In addition, despite moves to increase the role of Ukrainian in various areas of public life, and in

⁴⁰ <http://www.gazeta.kg> 2.08.2003.

particular in education, Russian remains a powerful force. This is best illustrated by the recent (2004) parliamentary debates on whether or not to grant Russian official status with Ukrainian. Eventually, Ukraine may adopt a system with two official languages, Ukrainian and Russian, and a high degree of bilingualism in the two communities.

Considerations of the potential negative impacts of abandoning or replacing Russian may also determine the future of the language in the former Soviet republics. Those countries that have attempted to discard Russian have sometimes been faced with unforeseen problems. For example, the Latvian Parliament was told in February 2004 that their language policy could jeopardise their possible membership in NATO since: 'It is not in our interest to admit countries that do not have good relations within their borders or with their neighbours.'⁴¹ This demonstrates that the former Soviet republics cannot disregard Russia in their policy planning. As one professor at Moscow's Linguistic University has suggested, the 'euphoria of independence' is at last beginning to fade, and people are starting to realize that hiding in their nationalist corners will not get them anywhere.⁴² Nonetheless, Latvia, together with Lithuania and Estonia, were later accepted as members of NATO and the EU.

Yet another problem is that in most of the former Soviet republics most newspapers and magazines are published in the local language, and fewer materials are being published in Russian. Should this trend continue there is the risk that many potential young scholars from other countries who know Russian, but not the local language, may be discouraged from conducting research in or about these countries.

Another potential problem for the countries that abandon Russian is that Russia is the largest, most dominant and most technologically advanced of the former Soviet republics. It has nearly three-quarters of former Soviet military territory and more than half of its population. It is estimated that Russia accounts for 75% of the gross domestic product of the former Soviet republics. In Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Russian is still widely used. If Russia continues to grow economically, a situation could

⁴¹ <http://www.gazeta.kg> 2.08.2003

⁴² www.pravapis.org/art_no_russian.afp

develop where it would prefer to invest in these countries, rather than in those former Soviet republics that have abandoned or restricted Russian, thus forcing those that have resisted to finally yield to a new incoming linguistic tide that favours Russian.⁴³

One other factor that may help to determine the future of the Russian language in the former Soviet republics is the level of support that Russia provides for Russian-language schools at all levels in these countries and the opportunities it provides for students from these countries to pursue higher education in Russia. In these areas Russia has responded in a number of ways. For example, the head of the Ministry of Education's Department for the CIS, Yuri Kungurtsev, has reported the establishment of three Russian universities in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, an indication that Russian officials are working to encourage the study and use of Russian outside the Federation.⁴⁴ In addition, the Russian education minister has announced that the quota for scholarship students from CIS countries who want to study in Russian high schools had been almost doubled. Kyrgyzstan's quota is now six times higher than it was before.⁴⁵ At the Bishkek congress mentioned earlier, Vladimir Filipov, then Minister of Education, announced that Moscow had decided to increase funds to \$6 million to support the Russian language in the CIS.⁴⁶ Clearly, the Russian government is intent on trying to regain for the Russian language the status it previously enjoyed in these regions.

In this context one must consider the efforts that have been made in some circles to replace Russian with another language as the means of communication between some countries. For example, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey evinced great interest in Central Asia, especially regarding the issue of creating a new alphabet for the Turkic languages. In November 1991, at a conference held at Marmara University in Turkey a common Turkic alphabet based on the Latin alphabet used in Turkey was adopted. It was believed that this would be a step towards bringing Turkey and the Central Asian Turkic republics closer, as well as to reducing the influence

⁴³ www.epic.org/periphelion

⁴⁴ Reported in <http://www.atimes.com>.

⁴⁵ Reported by *The Times of Central Asia*, 12 March 2004.

⁴⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2004.

of Russia and Russian in the region. However, this project was doomed to failure, as each of the Central Asian republics later introduced their own alternative alphabets.⁴⁷ What Turkey apparently did not fully appreciate was that the proposed Turkic alphabet did not reflect the unique characteristics of each language. The Central Asian Turkic languages have followed different lines of development and many are no longer mutually intelligible. As a result, Russian is still used as the means of communication among the different ethnic and national groups. Nonetheless, Turkey still has a lively interest in the region, maintaining a number of educational institutions there and even opening new ones (Demir et al 2000).

The desire to see Turkish replace Russian as the lingua franca in parts of the former Soviet Union is not restricted only to Central Asia. At a conference held in Kars, Turkey in September 2004 an Azeri scholar stated that he believed Turkish should replace Russian as the common language of communication in the South Caucasus. However, while such a statement may have been motivated by nationalistic sentiments, it clearly does not take into account the historical, political, and cultural realities of this region. Neither Georgia nor Armenia is likely to adopt Turkish in place of Russian as the language of regional communication.

Despite some resistance, Russian will continue to be a significant language well into the future in most of the republics of the former Soviet Union. Reasons for this vary. In the republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, Russian serves as an established medium of regional and interethnic communication, a fact that could have important economic implications (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997, 159). In Central Asia in particular, it is the language of the skilled Russian workforce and remains the language of instruction for science and technology, a fact which gives it considerable prestige over the local languages (Kaplan and Baldauf 241). In addition, for the political and cultural elites who were educated during the Soviet era Russian was *the* language of administration and culture and may serve as a part of their elite identity (Kaplan and Baldauf 299). For example, the Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov pointed out in his welcome speech to the congress participants in Bishkek, 'each language is unique and thirsts for recognition'.

⁴⁷ <http://www.ias.nl>

He then continued: 'But, following our traditions and developing our language, we must never forget about the people and language that have helped us to come out of medieval darkness. For this reason we will save, protect, use and cultivate the Russian language as one of the greatest values of the Kyrgyz nation.'⁴⁸

A similar statement was made by the Azeri mayor of Ganja at the Kars conference. The scholars attending from the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia all gave their talks in Russian, but later I heard the Azeri delegation speaking Russian among themselves. When I asked them why they were speaking Russian rather than their own language with each other, the mayor of Ganja answered that they had to remember Russian in order to keep good relations with their close neighbour, and that they also were greatly indebted to them.

In addition, for many of these countries relations with Russia – political, military, and economic – are, and will continue to be important, despite the desire by some of them to forge closer links to the West. Many of the former Soviet republics suffer from weak economies and high unemployment, and may find it easier to receive aid from and conduct business with their close neighbour with whom they share recent historical ties, than a distant country and relative new-comer to the region like the United States.

Ultimately, the fate of the Russian language in these countries is in the hands of the young generation growing up after the breakup of the Soviet Union. As an indication of the attitude of the new generation in some of the former Soviet republics toward the Russian language I can provide an example from my own teaching experience. Several of my students enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate courses in the Russian Language and Literature Department at Ankara University come from various former Soviet republics. Despite already being able to speak Russian, they are determined to improve their knowledge of Russian grammar, composition, and literature, and even want to learn Old Russian. They clearly believe that when they return home to their own countries they will be able to teach Russian or find other employment with their knowledge of Russian. Despite being encouraged to study English also, they show little inclination to do so, preferring to further

⁴⁸ See *The Times of Central Asia*, 12 March 2004.

their studies of Russian; they perceive a continuing and important role for Russian in their countries in the years to come.

If, despite official language policies, the young people of these former Soviet republics continue to feel the need to learn Russian, language planners in these countries may need to reconsider the strategies they have adopted to promote and preserve their national languages. These have generally taken a 'top-down' approach, with little or no attempt to ascertain what the citizens of their countries actually want. For example, those responsible for language policy may discover, as have other countries attempting to promote a new national language, that the financial costs and long-term efforts to modernise and intellectualise their languages to the degree that they are able to fully replace Russian in the areas of law, administration and higher education are simply not worthwhile nor widely accepted by their own citizens.⁴⁹

Another point that seems to have received little consideration is the 'ripple effect' that language policy in one country can have in neighbouring countries (Kaplan and Baldauf 271). For example, restrictions directed at Russian and Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia could engender calls by some groups in Russia to adopt some type of punitive measures in retaliation. In Central Asia, any attempt by Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan to impose their national languages on the Uzbek minorities inside their borders also has the potential to create discord among these ethnic groups within their borders and tension in their relations with Uzbekistan.

To be effective in the long term, language planners will need consider a number of factors: among these are the purpose or purposes of language planning; the needs and desires of their citizens; the economic costs and perceived benefits of a particular language policy; the possible effects of this policy in other areas, neighbouring countries in particular; and the question of who should be involved in the formation of language policy.⁵⁰ Specifically, language planners in the former Soviet republics will need to carefully

⁴⁹ Intellectualisation refers to the process of developing new linguistic resources to discuss and disseminate information at the highest levels of intellectual application and abstract realities. For an introduction to the topic of intellectualisation see Liddicoat and Bryant; for a discussion of the efforts to intellectualise Filipino see Gonzalez.

⁵⁰ For a overview of the various issues involved in language planning and language policy see Kaplan and Baldauf.

examine the role of the Russian language in their countries and plot a new, more realistic language policy, one that takes into account the linguistic and ethnic diversity of their societies.⁵¹

Whatever policies these former Soviet republics eventually adopt in regard to their national languages, Russian seems unlikely to vanish soon from public life except in the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania whose governments have resolutely allied their countries with the West and have shown little or no inclination to give Russian a role in their societies, and where the pressure on the Russian community to assimilate is greatest. In the republics of the south Caucasus and Central Asia as well as in Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, whether as the regional lingua franca, the language of interethnic communication, the language of science and technology, or even as an official language, Russian looks set to continue to play an important role well into the future.

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⁵¹ For a discussion of language planning that not only recognises, but encourages linguistic diversity see Mühlhäusler 2000.

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