

*Leprêtre, Marc.* Políticas idiomáticas en los estados sucesores de la Unión Soviética: una breve valoración del lenguaje, los derechos lingüísticos y la identidad nacional

# **POLÍTICAS IDIOMÁTICAS EN LOS ESTADOS SUCESORES DE LA UNIÓN SOVIÉTICA: UNA BREVE VALORACIÓN DEL LENGUAJE, LOS DERECHOS LINGÜÍSTICOS Y LA IDENTIDAD NACIONAL**

**MARC LEPRÊTRE**

## **RESUMEN**

El artículo describe las diferentes políticas lingüísticas llevadas a cabo en Rusia y en las antiguas repúblicas de la Unión Soviética, subrayando la importancia de los antecedentes históricos, las relaciones entre lengua y nacionalismo, y la promoción de las lenguas como un instrumento para la prevención de los conflictos interétnicos y asegurar una gestión pacífica y equilibrada de la diversidad lingüística. El texto se estructura en seis secciones: antecedentes históricos: política nacional y 'nation-building' en la Unión Soviética; las tensiones interétnicas en Rusia dentro del contexto post-soviético; el despertar de los grupos nacionales en Rusia y la legislación lingüística; derechos lingüísticos en las constituciones de la ex-repúblicas soviéticas de Asia Central; principales características de la política lingüística en Lituania y Letonia; y estrategias para una gestión pacífica y equilibrada de la diversidad lingüística en la Federación Rusa y en las antiguas repúblicas soviéticas.

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## **LANGUAGE POLICIES IN THE SOVIET SUCCESSOR STATES: A BRIEF ASSESSMENT ON LANGUAGE, LINGUISTIC RIGHTS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY<sup>1</sup>**

**MARC LEPRÊTRE<sup>2</sup>**

mlepretre@retemail.es

### **SUMMARY**

This paper gives an overview on the different language policies implemented in Russia and in the Soviet successor states, stressing the importance of the historical background, the relations between language and nationalism, and language promotion as a tool for preventing inter-ethnic conflicts and for ensuring a peaceful and balanced linguistic diversity. The text is structured in six sections: historical overview: language policy and nation-building in the USSR; interethnic tensions in the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet context; the awakening of national groups in Russia and linguistic legislation; linguistic rights in the constitutions of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia; basic features of language policy in Lithuania and Latvia; and strategies for a peaceful and balanced management of linguistic diversity in the Russian Federation and the Soviet successor states.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to space constraints this article will deal mainly with language policies and linguistic rights in the Russian Federation, the Soviet successor states in Central Asia, Latvia and Lithuania, with short references to Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia and Moldova in the conclusions.

<sup>2</sup> Senior researcher at the Institute of Catalan Sociolinguistics, Barcelona, Spain. The author is grateful and indebted for the support and contributions to **Dr. Ina Druviete** (Head of the Latvian Language Council, Riga); **Zurab Dvali** (TV and Radio Broadcasting of Georgia, Tbilissi); **Dr. Ayla Göl** (Department of International Relations, Ankara University); **Dr. François Grin** (Adjunct Director of Geneva's Service for Education Research and Senior Lecturer at the University of Geneva); **Bossia Kornousova** (Kalmyk Centre for Intensive Language Teaching, Elista, Kalmykia); **Dr. Danguolė Mikulėnienė** (Chair of the State Commission of the Lithuanian Language at the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Vilnius); **Virginia Unamuno** (CIEMEN, Barcelona); and **Dr. Alexey Yeschenko** (Director of the North-Caucasian Institute of Linguistics, Pyatigorsk). The usual disclaimer applies.

## 1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: LANGUAGE POLICY AND NATION-BUILDING IN THE USSR

The processes of language planning and language policy carried on since 1991 in the Soviet successor states can't be explained without a short reference to the historical, political and social outcomes raised by the nationality and language policies implemented during decades in the USSR. Nevertheless, insofar as the topic of this paper is what is going on nowadays regarding the management of language diversity, I will try to summarize this historical background<sup>3</sup>.

The ideological bases of the Soviet nationality policies and the process of nationalization<sup>4</sup> implemented in the republics had a rather paradoxical character as far as on the one hand the Soviet regime entitled the nationalities with a well-defined political and territorial status -even for those which had not yet reached a pre-capitalist state of development- which led to a process of nation-building where political and territorial units were created on the basis of nations that constituted themselves as historical cultural communities during the Tsarist period, contrary to what had been the usual pattern in Western Europe. On the other hand, these processes took place in a parallel way with a gradual policy of repression of national historical cultures that only preserved the most ethnographic and folkloric elements. Furthermore, and according to the analysis proposed by Gellner regarding the formation of nations during the processes of modernization<sup>5</sup>, we can argue that Soviet Marxism did not consider the peripheral nationalities as deep rooted societies in the modern economic and politic structures, but as 'folkloric' or 'ethnographic' nations. Noneless, the logical ground of Bolshevik policy towards nationalities after the Revolution - the *korenizatsiia*<sup>6</sup>- constituted a formula according to which those nations whose collective rights had been denied and repressed during the Tsarist period should have access to the free exercise of these rights within the general framework of the building of socialism in order to reach by themselves the conclusion that national sovereignty was not by itself a solution to all the national, cultural, social, politic and economic problems of development. The final goal was therefore the merger of all nations into a single socialist community, once all national cultures had had the opportunity to bloom during the period of construction of socialism. All this was stressed by Stalin at the XVI Congress of the CPSU (b) in 1930:

*Il faut laisser les initiatives nationales grandir et se déployer en manifestant toutes leurs vertus potentielles pour leur permettre ensuite de se fondre en une seule culture avec une seule langue commune. L'épanouissement des cultures, nationales par la forme et socialistes par le contenu, sous le régime de la dictature du prolétariat dans un seul pays, pour leur fusion en une seule culture socialiste par la forme*

<sup>3</sup> For further details and in-depth analysis see Kirkwood (1989), Liber (1991) and Leprêtre (1999).

<sup>4</sup> *Natsionalnoe stroitelstvo* [construction of nations] has broadly speaking the same meaning that the concept of 'nation-building' which will be used from now onwards.

<sup>5</sup> Gellner (1983)

<sup>6</sup> Nationalisation policy of the State's nations and ethnic groups applied during the 20's, overlapping with the NEP [Novaya Ekonomicheskaya Politika].

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*comme par le contenu, avec une seule langue commune au moment où le prolétariat triomphera dans le monde entier et où le socialisme entrera dans les mœurs, voilà précisément où est l'essence dialectique de la conception léniniste du problème des cultures nationales.*<sup>7</sup>

This policy was likewise aimed to be a lenitive for the social, political and national tensions that emerged successively in the cities, the rural areas and the periphery of the State during the Revolution, the Civil War and the process of building of the Soviet state. In order to solve these tensions, the Bolsheviks implemented three kinds of policy:

- a) the application of the principle of national-territorial autonomy as the cornerstone of the recently created Socialist Federative Soviet Republic of Russia;
- b) the formation of autonomous territorial units in peripheral regions; and
- c) the implementation of *korenizatsiia* at large scale.

At the same time, these policies were followed by two corollaries to ensure full support from peasants and urban workers to the regime: the NEP and the massive enlistment of proletarians into the Party.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the outcomes of the Soviet nationality policies can be summed up as follows:

*La politique linguistique est sans aucun doute le plus original de l'action menée par le pouvoir en matière nationale. C'est aussi, cela est certain, sa plus parfaite réussite*<sup>8</sup>.

Actually the different language policies implemented in the Soviet Union are for sure one of the most salient achievements of the regime insofar as we can't detach them from the political, social and economic events which took place during seven decades neither from the changes in the correlations of forces within the top ranks of the State and of the federated republics. The changes in the demographic structure of the population during the process of modernization of Soviet economy and society contributed likewise to strengthen, especially in the urban areas, the tensions raised by the contacts between languages together with other factors as the size of linguistic and national groups, the experience (historical or recent) of contacts with other ethnic groups, the geographic location or concrete linguistic, religious and cultural kinships. Insofar as the policies implemented by the State in order to ensure the equality between nations were based on the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the dialectical relations established between the different nationalities, the underlying motivations of linguistic and national policies were that the

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Bogdan, 1993:219.

<sup>8</sup> Carrère d'Encause, 1978:203.

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modernization of the different ethnic groups of the USSR could not be achieved if the autochthonous populations didn't manage to reach a high level of literacy, culture and social and political consciousness. At the same time, the new needs of the Soviet society (industrialization, technologic challenges, building of socialism) required the creation of a new society with an adequate critical mass of individuals able to deal with new technical and intellectual tools in order to implement and make real the projects designed by the State.

On the other hand, the Socialist Revolution happened in a country which didn't possess the objective conditions for its consolidation - the structure of the population was overwhelmingly formed by peasant, the urban proletariat was scarce, the level of industrialization still low according to Western standards as well as the political and cultural development of the population- although the new regime managed to set up new structures of power after a long civil war. Nevertheless, the strengthening of the new State and the building of socialism required a radical change in the social, political, cultural and economic composition of the country. As far as the industrialization of the USSR was a *sine qua non* condition for its own survival, the most effective and fast way to gain the support (or neutrality) of the non-Russian nationalities, as well as to inculcate into them the new political culture was to use the autochthonous languages as one of the main tools of this process of learning and change. It was therefore necessary to set up a new educational system and new cultural, ideological and communicative domains in different languages. This is the reason why language policy was from the very beginning one of the main cruxes of the Soviet policy towards nationalities.

Language policy was carried on by the Narkomnats<sup>9</sup> by means of four main activities:

- a) the selection of a standard code for every autochthonous language and its dissemination as a common language of communication for the populations of the autonomous territorial units;
- b) the modernization of the lexicon according to the needs of a modern industrial society;
- c) the reform or creation of new alphabets for the autochthonous languages; and
- d) the large-scale literacy campaign in the peripheral regions by means of the teaching of the autochthonous languages in new national school systems.

As a long term result of this kind of policies, at the end of the Soviet Union the overall picture of the sociolinguistic situation of both the autochthonous languages and Russian as the common language of communication between all the parts of the State was as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> *Narodnii Kommissariat po Delam Natsionalnostei* [People's Commissariat for Nationalities Affairs].

**Table 1. Ethnic groups, knowledge of Russian and of the language of the titular ethnic group (1989)**

Republic	Majority groups (%)	% Knowledge of Russian	% Knowledge of language of titular ethnic group
Armenia	Armenians (93)	45	--
	Azeris (3)	19	7
Azerbaijan	Azeris (83)	32	--
	Russians (6)	--	15
	Armenians (6)	69	7
Belarus	Belorussians (78)	80	--
	Russians (13)	--	27
Estonia	Estonians (62)	35	--
	Russians (30)	--	15
Georgia	Georgians (70)	32	--
	Armenians (8)	52	26
	Russians (6)	--	24
	Åzeris (6)	35	10
Kazakhstan	Kazakhs (40)	64	--
	Russians (38)	--	9
Kyrgyztan	Kyrgyz (52)	37	--
	Russians (22)	--	12
	Uzbeks (13)	39	4
Latvia	Latvians (52)	68	--
	Russians (34)	--	22
Lithuania	Lithuanians (80)	38	--
	Russians (9)	--	38
	Poles (7)	67	21
Moldova	Moldavians (65)	58	--
	Ukrainians (14)	80	14
	Russians (13)	--	12
Tajikistan	Tadjiks (62)	31	--
	Uzbeks (24)	22	17
	Russians (8)	--	4
Turkmenistan	Turkmen's (72)	28	--
	Russians (10)	--	2
	Uzbeks (9)	29	16
Ukraine	Ukrainians (73)	72	--
	Russians (22)	--	34
Uzbekistan	Uzbeks (71)	27	--
	Russians (8)	--	5

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by *Natsionalnij Sostav Naselenija SSSR* (1991).

In short, Soviet language policy not only promoted the Russian language as the 'lingua franca' used for All-Union and inter-republican communications, but also improved and strengthened the position of the titular nations of the republics as well as that of their respective languages. At the same time, the gradual decline of the percentage of ethnic Russians in the USSR and a birth rate dramatically lower than that of the populations of Central Asia and Caucasus contributed to create a

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latent feeling of insecurity within the majority group which provoked the raising of a new type of Russian nationalism as a reaction towards the intensification of nationalists movements in the borders and the core itself of the Union. Finally, the outcomes of the Soviet language policy reflect the contradictions inherent in the processes of centralization and decentralization<sup>10</sup>, of promotion and repression which constituted the main characteristics of Soviet nationalities policies splitted between the class strategy and the nationalist tacticism:

*Thus when Gorbachev came to power in March 1985, Russian was being vigorously promoted as the language of inter-ethnic communication, the language of the Great Russian nation [...] The other languages of the Soviet Union were under varying degrees of pressure and many of them were in decline [...] That the policy of 'national-Russian' bilingualism seemed to be effective was reflected in census returns which regularly recorded high (if declining) retention rates for the mother tongue among the non-Russian nationalities (in many cases over 90%) and rising rates of acquisition of Russian as a second language (with, admittedly, quite widely ranging percentages...)<sup>11</sup>*

## **2. INTERETHNIC TENSIONS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE POST-SOVIET CONTEXT**

The break-up of the Soviet Union and the increase of interethnic tensions within the very same Russian Federation implied the intensification of the Russian identity crisis that had been taking place during the process of construction of the Soviet patriotism from the mid 30's. The first signs of tension coincided with the declaration of sovereignty of the Autonomous Republics of Mari El, Komi and Tatarstan during the summer of 1990. These declarations of sovereignty meant an attempt to force the federal authorities into granting them a higher level of autonomy that would allow local authorities to control and manage their natural resources (diamonds, petroleum, gas, wood industry) in order to have direct access to foreign markets.

The initial negotiations aiming at the signature of the Union Treaty of 1991 accelerated this process in such a way that, not only the sixteen Autonomous Republics of the RSFSR declared their sovereignty, but also the Autonomous Regions of Birobidzhan, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Khakassia, Gorno-Altay and Adygea, which claimed their conversion into Autonomous Republics, also did the same. In addition, as was the case at the beginning of the 20's, new territorial entities with no legal basis emerged, constituted from the unilateral decisions taken by local Soviets: the Greater Volga Association; the Greater Ural Association; the Far East Association; the Association of the Towns of Southern Russia; the aforementioned old Autonomous Regions reconverted into Autonomous Republics; the *de facto* independent Republic of Chechnya; and finally, the Tiumen District. Thus, Russia faced, throughout the entire Soviet State, a process of territorial, economic and social disintegration which had

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<sup>10</sup> Leprêtre, 1999: 236-239.

<sup>11</sup> Kirkwood, 1997:72-73.

marked consequences on the configuration of a new national identity which, for the first time since the Middle Ages, had to dissociate the concepts of Empire and State.

The Russian nation nowadays faces likewise an acute crisis of national identity and is looking for its own self-definition. In contrast with the classical paradigm according to which the national and identity issue is mainly the preoccupation of 'incomplete nations'<sup>12</sup> that are struggling to reaffirm themselves in the face of larger and more 'complete' nations, in today's Russia it is the dominant ethnic group who is looking for its self-definition. Broadly speaking, the existence of a Russian State (*Rossiiskoe Gosudartsvo*) was previous to the Russian nation(ality) (*Russkaya narodnost*) and, at the same time, the Russian Empire preceded the Russian State. According to this, the emergency of Russia as a nation was infallibly linked to the continuous process of expansion of the Empire towards the territories inhabited by alien ethnic groups. Another feature of the Russian Empire, later on shared with the Soviet Union, was found in the relations that were established between the Russian Nation and alien peoples. During Tsarism, the dominant classes of the peripheral societies were progressively assimilated by the elites of the center, such as was the case of the Tatars, the Georgians, the Germans, the Balts or the Poles. During some specific periods of the Communist regime, this same type of relationship was established, insofar as class or ideological considerations prevailed over ethnic identifications. In addition, during the period of the *korenizatsiia* to be Russian or to belong to a Russified national elite implied a curb on individuals who aspired to holding important positions in the national Republics. On the other hand, the very same Russians did not consider themselves as a particularly favoured nation by the previous regime: the economic indicators of the RSFSR were not substantially better than those of the other Republics, the purges of the 30's had caused more victims there than anywhere else, the Russians had contributed more than any other people to the Second World War, the environmental situation was awful, ethnical minorities identified them with Soviet totalitarianism, their contribution to the maintenance of the Centro-Asiatic Republics was considerable, etc. Finally, from the political point of view, the RSFSR was in no way privileged since it shared same rank with a great number of smaller ethnical groups and it was even underrepresented from the institutional point of view, insofar as many All-Union institutions took the place of Russian institutions. From this point of view, the coming of independence has not implied an improvement in the situation. While the loss of territories included in the Russian Empire and later on in the Soviet Union (especially Central Asia and Transcaucasia) was not a very traumatic experience, the secession of Belorussia and Ukraine was interpreted as an historic, identity and cultural amputation. In addition, the new map of the borders has turned almost 25 million ethnic Russians into foreign citizens in the old Federated Republics that many had long since considered to be their homeland. Although the disappearance of the Soviet State has allowed the Russians to go from being a little bit more than 50% of the USSR's population to represent more than 80% of the Russian Federation, the reinforcement of the Russians as an ethnic majority in stark contrast with a multiplicity of ethnic minorities has even more highlighted the idea that Russia is not only the State of the Russians but that

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<sup>12</sup> See Gellner (1964) and Hroch (1985).



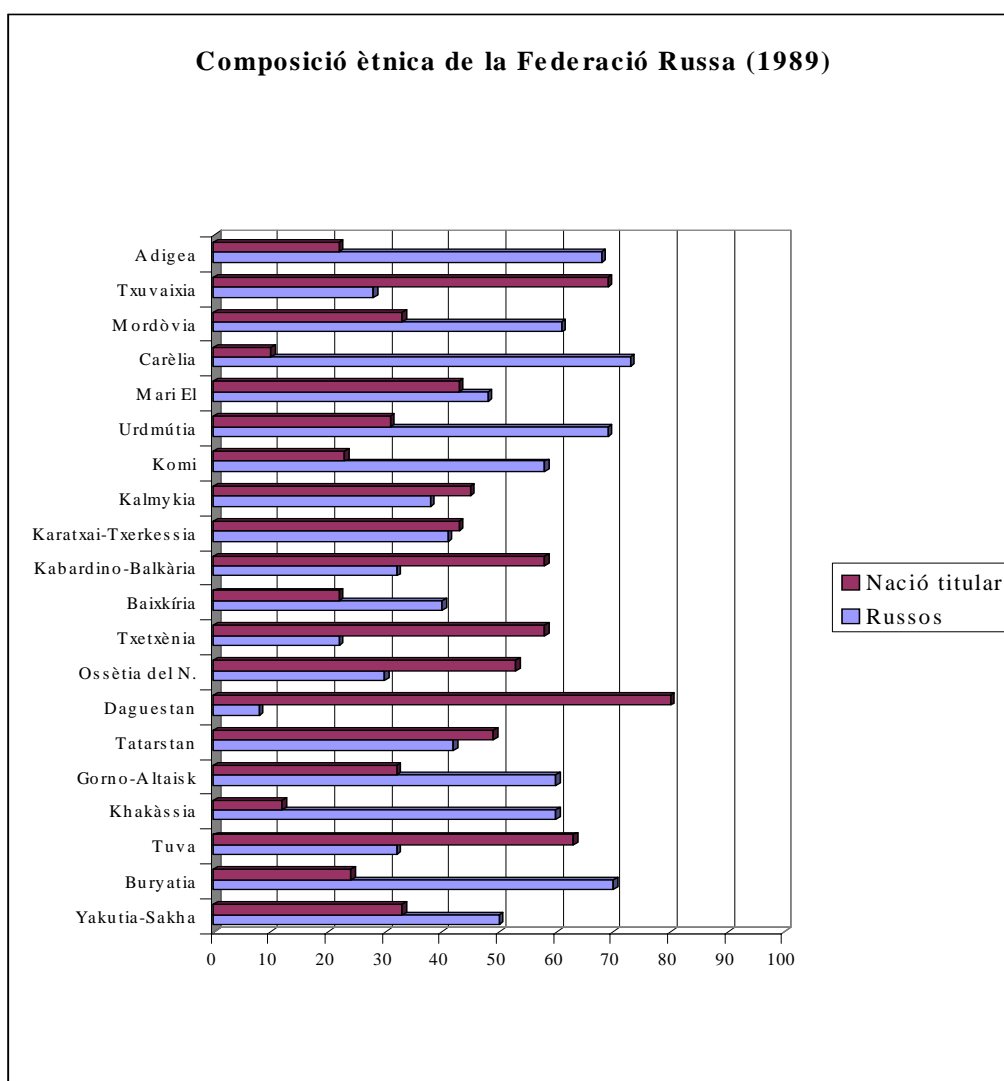
the Russian identity must also integrate alien elements. As a last resort, the present Russian Federation reproduces, on a smaller scale, the traditional contradiction between the ethnic and cultural groups and the political and territorial variables of the Russian national identity. This situation becomes more complex because the Russian Federation is made up of 89 subjects (of which 32 are defined in ethnic terms) between old Autonomous Republics, regions, districts and federal towns, all with equal rights and obligations according to the 1993 Constitution. But given the fact that the 1992 Federal Treaty appears to be more generous towards the Republics, there exists a duplicity of interpretations as regards the responsibilities that must be assumed by the federal institutions and those corresponding to the Republics. Therefore, after the break-up of the Soviet State, Russia has made its first steps along the path towards the recovery of its national identity and the reconstruction of its nationality. This new Russian identity is based, broadly speaking, on the Orthodox religion and a nationalism that reproduces, for lack of other models, the egalitarian, authoritarian and communitarian schemata of the traditional Russian society. This search for a new identity takes place within the framework of the traditional contradiction of a Russia split between its western aspirations and its tendency towards isolation. Being used to living within its own myths, Russian society looks for new social and moral points of reference to find a new position as a nation, given the fact that the pre-Revolutionary myths based on religion, Empire and autocracy were eliminated by the Bolshevik Revolution and were replaced by the new Bolshevik myths (proletarian internationalism, construction of socialism), now also disappeared.

However, significant changes took place gradually in the subjective perception that the Russians had their own identity, mainly as a consequence of the increase and the radicalization of alien peoples' defense of their rights which provoked an unavoidable confrontation between the center and the periphery. The Russians entered into direct competition with alien groups when claiming the solution of inequalities and grievances; from becoming aware of the huge financial aids granted to the Federated Republics, the delicate environmental situation, the moral corruption of the Soviet society as a whole, to the real extension of the Stalinist regime of terror and the arbitrariness's of the previous decades, which resulted not only in an explosion of nationalist feelings in the Republics, but also encouraged the leaders of the periphery to elude their responsibilities by means of systematic attacks on the center and the federal authorities identified with the Russians. The latter, seeing that they were associated with a policy and authorities that for seven decades had not treated them in any way substantially different from the way they treated other Republics and, in addition, seeing themselves as being deprived of national political, economic and cultural institutions because of the overlapping of the Soviet and Russian institutions, launched a revival of a deeply ethnical Russian nationalism. The emerging of nationalist movements at the heart of the RSFSR (Tatarstan, Yakutia-Sakha, Chechnya, Tuva, Buryatia, Dagestan, Northern Ossetia, etc.) provoked a chain reaction in the Russian population, in such a way that many Russian nationalist movements that arose under the protection of the *perestroika* started, unlike their predecessors of the 70's, to employ the centrifuge tactics of the peripheral nationalist movements. In such a situation, faced with the intensification of the anti-Russian xenophobe feelings in the Transcaucasian and Centro-Asiatic Republics and the establishment of new

legislations as regards languages and education that benefited autochthonous languages, the Russian nationalists organized themselves by creating popular fronts, as was happening in the Baltic countries or in Transcaucasia. This radicalization of Russian nationalism provoked a double confrontation between the RSFSR and the Federated Republics, on the one hand, and between the very same RSFSR and the federal authorities, on the other. The fact that after the break-up of the USSR the Russian Federation still existed as a sole territorial entity with such a complex multiethnic composition gave rise among the Russian population to a feeling that their country, now an orphan of reference points on which to draw and construct a new identity, had simply become what was left of the USSR, once any influence on the other Federated Republics, some of which (Belarus and Ukraine) constituted some of the symbolic references of Great Russia since the X century, had been lost.

The following graph states the ethnic composition in the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation.

**Graph 1. Ethnic composition of the Russian Federation (1989)**



Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by *Natsionalnii Sostav Naseleniia SSSR* (1991)

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The future articulation of the Russian national identity and State is extremely complex insofar as, until now, it does not seem that they have planned either any coherent plan for development or any precise orientations on economic, social and national policies that would allow for the consolidation process of democracy in the Russian Federation. Faced with the outbreak of national and identity cohesion of post-Soviet Russia, the foundations on which the new identity and the new State should be based contain major contradictions, while the general context hinders the articulation of a civil society traditionally underdeveloped, given the fact that, neither the concept of an ethnic Russia nor that of the imperial Russia can mobilize or unite the Russian citizens under the same national project; that the intensification of the economic and regional particularities threaten to dislocate the territorial structure of the Federation; that the moral and social disorientation has become generalized among a population lacking in points of reference and identification due to the disappearance of the old pre- and post-Communist values; and that the endemic economic crisis has driven tens of millions of people to subsist below the poverty level. In short, the facts and circumstances made explicit throughout these pages constitute a complex network that Russia will have to solve in order to begin the process of democracy, political, social and economic stability and national reconstruction.

### **3. THE AWAKENING OF NATIONAL GROUPS IN RUSSIA AND LINGUISTIC LEGISLATION**

The Russian Federation is made up of 176 national groups and an almost equal number of languages spoken. These minority communities represent approximately 28 million people, 20% of the total population<sup>13</sup>. This ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity is reflected in the Federal Statutes of the country, with 21 National Republics, to which we have to add the Autonomous Regions and Districts. Minority areas are characterized by a very strong interweaving of peoples. The Russian population represents between 30 and 80% of the population of the Republics in Siberia, between 30 and 70% of the central and northern regions, and between 10 and 40% in the Caucasus. To it we have to add the presence of other national groups which represent between 5 and 40% of the Republics' population. Besides, the titular nationality (eponym of the Republic) is only majority in 7 of the 21 Republics. Taking this multiculturalism into consideration has implied the acknowledgement of a considerable political power in the titular minorities, although this power often has to be relativised due to the absence or scarcity of financial means and that Moscow still keeps an important influence through the subsidies (that may reach 90% of some Republics' budget) and the granting of credits for the acquisition and provision of energy supplies. In addition, the important sociocultural crisis that provoked the fall of communism still perpetuates. Letting aside the North Caucasus, the *UNESCO Red Book on Endangered Languages* only reports in Russia on three minority languages that are not endangered<sup>14</sup>. All the others are considered as being "on the verge of extinction" or "threatened". This contrast between the will of reconstructing national identity and the real situation may imply a feeling of

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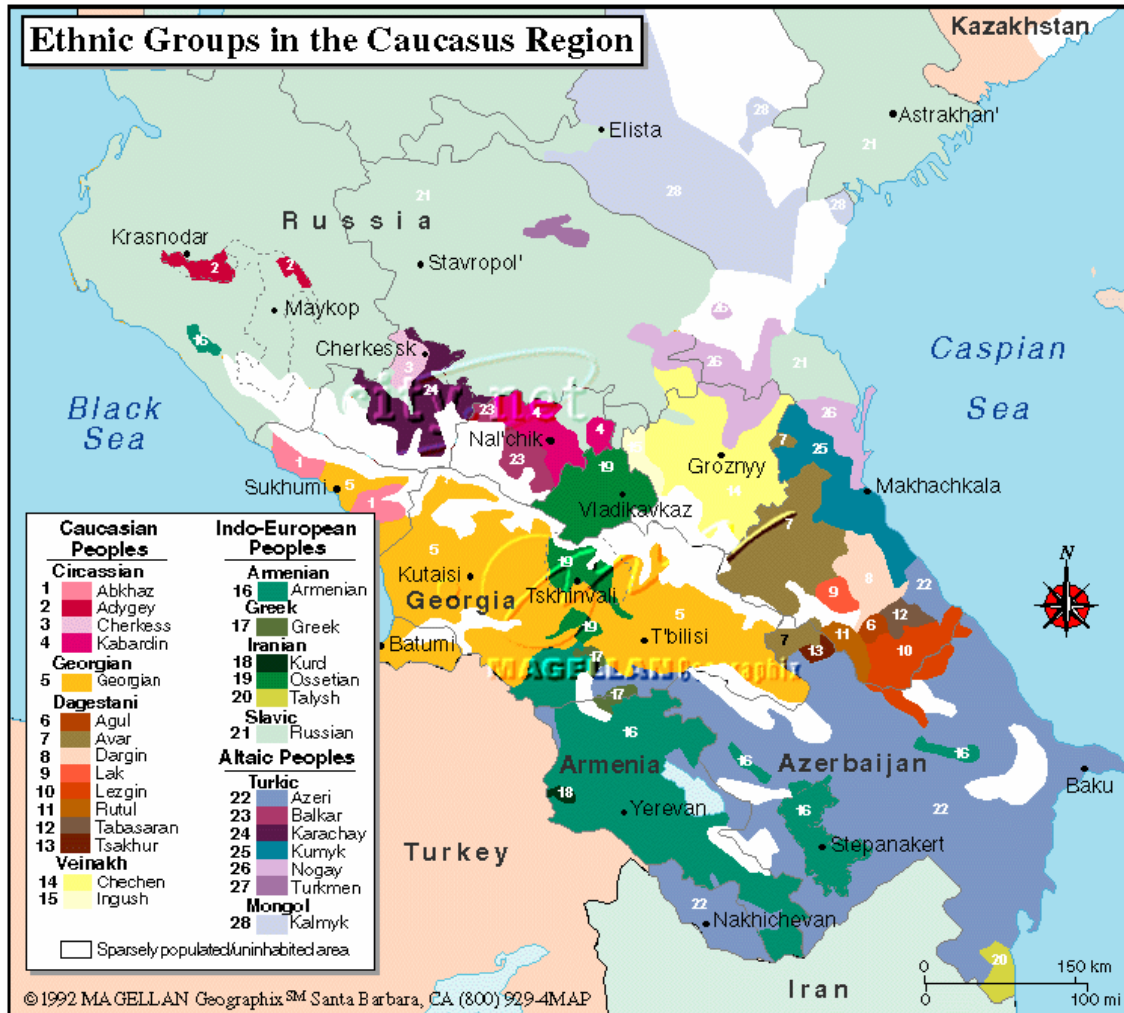
<sup>13</sup> The population data correspond to 1989, year of the last Soviet census. Due to budget and financial constraints, the new census expected in 1999 has been delayed several times and will probably be undertaken in 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Tatar, Yakut and Tuvan. See Salminen (1999).

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urgency that sometimes force titular nationalities to take radical action in order to protect their language and their identity, while often at the same time political and social tensions feed on ethnic and cultural tensions.

Map 1. Ethnic groups in Caucasus region



Within this context, the linguistic issue crystallizes in the demand for the recognition of the identity of the different peoples of Russia, while this constitutes in itself a source of tensions. In the territories of the old Soviet Union, linguistic decrees and laws have very significantly contributed to the worsening of the tensions in Moldova and language issues still mark the agenda of political action in the Baltic States, especially in Estonia and Latvia. In Central Asia, Russian minorities are in a delicate situation because the use of national languages has become an important indicator of the citizens' political loyalty, although very often they lack the necessary structures from which to learn them. The situation seems less serious in Russia, where Russian still is globally accepted as a *lingua franca* and where each Republic can add one or more official languages. But quite often the problem is found in the criteria for choosing the official languages. All the Republics, excepting four of them, have

adopted linguistic laws that give priority to the language of the titular nationality. In Bashkiria, the official status of the national language together with Russian is the object of major controversy given the opposition of the Tatars -the second most important community in demographic weight after the Russians and before the Bashkirians- because of the refusal of the Bashkirians to proclaim the official status of Tatar in the Republic. The situation is especially complex in Dagestan where 80% of the population is Dagestanian but more than 30 languages cohabit. Also, some decrees establishing the adoption of the Latin alphabet instead of the Cyrillic one (for instance, the Decree of July 1999 in Tatarstan) are usually interpreted as an overt challenge which aims to increase the distancing from Moscow. In addition, the adoption of constitutional clauses that limit and even impede the access to political or administrative responsibilities for citizens that do not know the national language of the titular ethnic group, as in the case of Adygea, Northern Ossetia, Bashkiria and Mari El, also represent a danger for the stability of interethnic relationships. There also exists the temptation on the part of some titular nationalities to use the linguistic issue to provoke demographic changes that would imply a higher representation of their community: what the French call "*le vote avec ses pieds*" ("the vote with one's feet") is also a reality in Russia, despite the fact that the exodus of Russians towards Republics with a majority Russian population is mainly due to economic problems. The lack of local structures for mediation to look after the legitimate interests of the Russophone communities and of the other minority groups is even more dangerous if we take into account that Moscow does not always have enough capacity or legitimacy to play this role.

As regards the development of linguistic legislation within the Russian Federation after the disintegration of the USSR, the 1993 Constitution marked a change concerning the previous situation, for it starts with the following Preamble:

*"We, the multinational people of the Russian Federation, united by a common destiny on our land, asserting human rights and liberties, civil peace and accord, preserving the historic unity of the State, proceeding from the commonly recognized principles of equality and self-determination of the peoples, honoring the memory of our ancestors (...)"*<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, the old Soviet Republics started to adopt a series of legal measures that proclaimed the official status of the autochthonous language<sup>16</sup>. Russia also promulgated the first linguistic law of its history on October 25, 1991 (Law on the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation), where the languages of the Republic were mentioned as an integral part of national patrimony and of its historical and cultural heritage. According to Article 2.2., "On the territory of the RSFSR the State shall guarantee language sovereignty of each people irrespective of its number and legal position and language sovereignty of a person irrespective of the origin of a human being, his or her social and material position, racial and national belonging, sex, education, relation to religion and domicile area."

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<sup>15</sup> Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993).

<sup>16</sup> The linguistic laws approved by the Baltic Republics since 1989 had an important influence on the decrees that applied to the RSFSR as regards multilingualism.

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All the same, Article 3.2. establishes that: "The Russian language, being a main means of cross-national communication of the peoples of the RSFSR according to the established historical and cultural traditions, has the status of the state language on the whole territory of the RSFSR". Because of their importance, two other legal texts also stand out: firstly, the Federal Law on the General Principles of the Local Self-Government Organization, passed on August 28, 1995 and modified on April 22, 1996, for it grants competencies in the field of education in the autonomous territorial entities (Article 6.2.6.). The second text, the Federal Law on National and Cultural Autonomy of June 17, 1996, proclaims the right to maintain and develop the autochthonous languages of the Republics and autonomous territorial bodies (Article 9), recognizes the right to be educated in Primary School in the mother tongue of the pupil and to choose the language of education (Articles 10, 11, 12).

The Constitution and the federal laws that regulate the rights of the speakers of the languages of the autochthonous communities have been followed by a long series of linguistic legislations approved by the different Republics. Thus, practically all the Constitutions of the Republics proclaim the official status of Russian and of the autochthonous language, except for those of Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Mordovia and Northern Ossetia, where other languages or even dialects of the autochthonous language can be added to them. As regards the legal texts of lesser importance, such as decrees or linguistic regulations, the Republics of Karelia, Udmurtia, Dagestan and Karachaevo-Cherkessia still have not adopted any as such, while this is not the case in the Republics of Tatarstan, Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, Chuvashia, Tuva, Buryatia, Kalmykia, Khakassia, Yakutia-Sakha and Bashkiria where they have done so.

The fundamental elements common to the legal dispositions as regards the languages proclaimed in the different Republics of the Russian Federation are found in the desire for conservation, development and promotion of the autochthonous language, its introduction or extension in the educational system, the training of teachers, the promotion of literature, of science and arts, as well as the use of these languages in the audio-visual media. Parallel to this, each Republic takes care of regulating the use of the official languages in the administration, in the legislation and official documents, in the juridical system and in the relations between the administration and the citizens.

The linguistic and cultural processes that take place in the Russian Federation are determined by a combination of factors reported on in the previous pages: a) the great cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of the population throughout the entire territory; b) the demographically predominant presence of the Russians in most of the Autonomous Republics; c) the influence of the national-territorial criteria established by the Soviet regime in order to manage linguistic and ethnical diversity; and d) the processes of economic restructuring that are taking place in a disorderly fashion.

I have already mentioned that in only 7 of the 21 national territorial entities the titular nationality constitutes the majority of the population<sup>17</sup>. In addition, most of these entities reproduce on a microscale the mosaic of nationalities, languages, cultures and religions present throughout the entire Federation. In the same way, Russian constitutes the language of communication between the center

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<sup>17</sup> See the graph in page 11.

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and the periphery, while the Russification process which started, with some pushing and pulling movements according to the interests and legitimization strategies of the Soviet regime, in the mid 30's, still has its effects on minority languages. As we have already seen, the application of a national-territorial criteria allowed for the development of the languages of the titular nationalities by means of the creation of some regional elites, and cultural, social and economic structures that made them turn into almost-States, even before the disappearance of the Soviet State. But from 1992 onwards, and in contrast with what was happening previously, the Federal Law on the National-Cultural Autonomy also allowed the national and linguistic communities that did not have their own politico-administrative structures to also enjoy the right to constitute themselves as autonomous territorial entities and to create the necessary conditions for the preservation and promotion of their own languages.

The economic situation derived from the chaotic transition from a planned economy to a free market economy also constitutes another hindrance for the peripheral ethnic and linguistic communities, given the fact that the majority of them depend on the subsidies granted by the authorities to avoid the total collapse of their economic structures; this leaves little margin for financing policies to promote autochthonous languages, if we consider the urgent priorities as regards social welfare, education, public health care and modernization of the economy.

In spite of everything, the main risk of interethnic tensions is concerned less with the relationships that may be established from now onwards between the federal authorities and the peripheral Republics, than with the capacity of the nationalities to take into consideration the situation, the needs and the interests of the other national communities present in their territory; to conciliate their desire to promote the autochthonous language with the awareness of the complexity and the slowness of the processes of transition and change in deep-rooted linguistic habits; and to establish operational structures that allow titular nationalities and minority groups to have access to the learning of the autochthonous language, very often only recently turned into the official language along with Russian. In short, it is fundamental and urgent that the nationalities can assume and successfully face this challenge in order to avoid a true disaster and an intensification of interethnic tensions:

*It is obvious that the languages of all the peoples in Russia including Russian are in a state of crisis. Many of them are on the verge of extinction. It is without a doubt, a humanitarian catastrophe although the socio-economic calamities of the last years have hidden it. The fact that the languages of indigenous peoples in the republics are decreed as state languages makes no difference. The crisis has gone so far that in many cases it seems irreversible<sup>18</sup>.*

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<sup>18</sup> Bgazhnokov, 2000.

#### 4. LINGUISTIC RIGHTS IN THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS OF CENTRAL ASIA

The long disintegrating process experienced by the Soviet successor states allows to have a wider perspective on the actual developments and, therefore, to make a brief review of how linguistic rights -and human rights in general- have been dealt with in the new independent states' policies. The former Soviet republics of Central Asia -Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan- are clear instances of the way in which linguistic policies were applied during the soviet period and, later on, from their independence onwards. On the other hand, it is important to see how the role of the Russian language as the mean of interethnic communication in the former Soviet Union -and, as a matter of fact, as the language of the administration and the educational system-, along with the diverse promotion of the autochthonous languages and their literacy policies, have decisively affected the linguistic and social development of the other spoken languages in the former USSR. and, consequently, their linguistic demography.

Despite the fact that the following data might have changed as a consequence of the revitalizing processes as regards national languages and cultures, which have occurred parallelly to de-russifying policies, they are still valid indicators of the effects resulting from the policies carried out during the last decades.

**Table 2. Percentage of Russian speakers and of Russian speaking the autochthonous language in Central Asian republics (1989)**

<i>Republic</i>	<i>Autochthonous population</i>	<i>Russian-speaking population</i>	<i>% of Russian speakers</i>	<i>% of Russian speaking the autochthonous language</i>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	6,531,921	59.4	6,226,400	0.9
<i>Kyrgyztan</i>	2,228,482	36.9	916,543	1.2
<i>Tadjikistan</i>	3,168,193	30.0	386.630	3.5
<i>Turkmenista n</i>	2,524,136	27.6	334,447	2.5
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	14,123,626	22.3	1,642,179	4.5

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by *Natsionalnij Sostav Naselenija SSSR* (1991).

Similarly, the percentages corresponding to the ethnic composition of each one of the republics are also extracted from the 1989 census, that is to say, during the last general available data for the former republics of the USSR.

**Table 3. Ethnic composition of the Central Asian republics (1989)**

<i>Republic</i>	<i>Russians</i>	<i>Autochthonous</i>	<i>Ukrainians</i>	<i>Tatars</i>	<i>Uzkeks</i>	<i>Others</i>
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	41%	36%	6%	4%	3%	10%
<i>Kyrgyztan</i>	26%	48%	3%	2%	12%	9%
<i>Tadjikistan</i>	12%	60%	--	3%	23%	2%
<i>Turkmenista n</i>	15%	68%	--	--	8%	9%
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	11%	70%	--	4%	--	15%

Source: Own elaboration from the data provided by *Natsionalnij Sostav Naselenija SSSR* (1991).



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The Declaration of Alma-Ata of December 21st, 1991, signed by nearly all of the federated republics after a referendum (March 1991), and according to which, the former USSR. disappeared in order to create the new Community of Independent States (CIS), carried the full capacity of decision and political sovereignty of these states:

*The independent states, the Azerbaijan Republic, the Armenian Republic, the Belarus Republic, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan and Ukraine*

*Intending to create democratic states with the rule of law, which mutual relationships be developed under the following principles: reciprocal recognition and respect towards the sovereignty and sovereign equality, the vested right to self-determination, the equality of rights and the non-interference in internal affairs, the non-recourse to threats or the use of force, the refusal of economic pressures or others, the peaceful resolution of discordances, the respect towards human rights and freedoms including the rights for ethnic minorities, the scrupulous application of compromises, other norms and principles universally recognized by international law.*

*Recognizing and respecting the territorial integrity and the immutability of the existing borders between them; Considering the friendly and neighbourhood relationships and the mutually advantageous cooperation, which are deeply and historically rooted, respond to the essential interest of peoples and serve to the cause of peace and security; Being conscious of their responsibility for the preservation of civil peace and interethnic relationships; Adhere to the objectives and principles of the agreement on the creation of the Community of Independent States.*<sup>19</sup>

After 1991, the new Central Asian states started to promulgate their new constitutions, which reaffirmed the officiality of their national languages. The Russian language, although still basic in relevant social domains and functions, has now fallen victim of the discontent piled up for years in the Central Asian republics for political and economic reasons which are not related to the language itself. For this reason, the new constitutions of these republics, despite giving Russian a special role as a mean for interethnic communication, offer a glimpse of a certain anti-Russian hostility -which is also evident in everyday life- in terms of linguistic exclusiveness.

For example, the Constitution of Kazakhstan states as follows:

Article 7

1. "In the Republic of Kazakhstan, the state language is Kazakh".
2. "In governmental organizations and in organs of local self-government, Russian may be officially employed on a par with Kazakh".

Article 12

1. "The Republic of Kazakhstan respects and guarantees its citizens rights and freedoms of the person in accordance with the Constitution".

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in *Butlletí del Centre Mercator*, 42, October 2000.

Article 14

2. "No one may be subjected to any sort of discrimination because of origin, social, official, or property status, gender, race, ethnicity, language, religious preference, convictions, place of residence, or any other circumstances".

Nevertheless, on the other hand, some restrictions have been introduced in order to ensure an autochthonous structure of power in the republic:

Article 41

2. "A citizen born in the Republic, no younger than forty years of age, with fluent command of the state language, who has been residing in Kazakhstan for no less than fifteen years may be elected President of the Republic".

As for Kyrgyzstan, the Constitution states that:

### **Article 5**

1. "The state language of the Kyrgyz Republic is the Kyrgyz language".
2. "The Kyrgyz Republic guarantees the preservation of, equal rights of, and the free development and functioning of Russian and all other languages which are used by the population of the republic".
3. "Abridgment of the rights and freedoms of citizens on the grounds of lack of knowledge of or inability to speak the state language is unlawful".

It is worth noting that since May 28, Russian language has been assigned the status of official language by the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan, following the policy on national integration carried out by the president Akayev. This measure intends to widen the legislative basis for the Russian speaking community, and seems to be aimed at the prevention of out-migration of ethnic Russians after the adoption, seven years ago, of the new constitution. Therefore, from now on Russian will be more than merely one official language of the Kyrgyz Republic, but rather the language for inter-ethnic communication. During the parliamentary discussions, some MPs manifested Uzbek should become official instead of Russian as far as approximately 14% of the Kyrgyz population speak Uzbek, whereas in the case of Russian the percentage is of 13%.

The Constitution of Tadjikistan allows more rights to the citizens as a whole and to minorities in particular:

Article 2

"The state language of Tadjikistan is Tadjik. Russian is a language of inter-ethnic communication. All nations and peoples residing on the territory of the republic have the right to use freely their native languages".

Article 6

"In Tadjikistan, the people are the possessors of the sovereignty and are the only source of state power, which is exercised both directly and also through the people's representatives. The people of Tadjikistan are the citizens of the Republic of Tadjikistan regardless of their ethnicity."

Article 8

"In Tadjikistan, social life develops on the basis of political and ideological pluralism. No state ideology or religion may be established. Social associations are formed and operate within the framework of the Constitution and laws. The state provides them with equal possibilities in their operations. Religious organizations are separate from the state and may not interfere in governmental affairs. The formation and operation of social associations which advocate

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racial, ethnic, social, or religious animosity or which incite violent overthrow of the constitutional system, as well as the organization of armed groups, are forbidden".

#### **Article 17**

"All persons are equal before the law and the courts. The government guarantees the rights and freedoms of every person regardless of ethnicity, race, sex, language, faith, political beliefs, education, or social or property status. Men and women have equal rights".

The Constitution of Uzbekistan doesn't present significant difference with respect to those of the other above-mentioned republics:

#### Article 4

"The state language of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the Uzbek language".  
"The Republic of Uzbekistan ensures a respectful attitude towards the languages, customs, and traditions of the nationalities and peoples living on its territory and ensures conditions for their development".

#### **Article 57**

"It is forbidden to form or operate political parties, as well as other social associations, that have as their goal violent change of the constitutional system; protest against the sovereignty, integrity, or security of the republic or the constitutional rights and freedoms of its citizens; advocacy of war, social, national, racial, or religious animosity; encroachment on the health or morality of the people; or that are militaristic formations or ethnically or religiously based political parties".

#### **Article 90**

"A citizen of the Republic of Uzbekistan who is not younger than thirty five years of age, who has fluent command of the state language, and who has constantly resided on the territory of Uzbekistan for no less than ten consecutive years directly prior to the election may be elected President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The same person may not be President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for more than two consecutive terms".

The case of Turkmenistan is radically different as far as despite what the Constitution of Republic states, for example, in its Article 17:

"Turkmenistan guarantees the equality of the rights and freedoms of its citizens and, likewise, the equality of citizens before the law regardless of nationality, ethnic origin, property holdings, official status, place of residence, language, religious preference, political convictions, or political party membership"

The situation is critical for linguistic minorities. In contrast to the protective policies regarding the Russian-speaking minorities undertaken in other ex-soviet republics, such as Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan, where Russian has been given a privilege status, the new political leaders in Turkmenistan have been long ago supporting a campaign contrary to the interest of this community, among others. It is estimated that 25% of the Russian-speaking population has left the country ever since 1994 as a result of such measures. The obligatory knowledge of the current national language, Turkmen, prevents members from other linguistic communities to have an access to posts of political responsibility. Besides, they must all go through a selection which takes into account their genealogical origins. Amongst the other measures there is the

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reduction of radio broadcasts in Russian or the confiscation of journals and books edited abroad.

## **5. BASIC FEATURES OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN LITHUANIA AND LATVIA**

In the case of Lithuania, national identity is first and foremost related to the autochthonous language and its preservation. Official authorities therefore consider that only the status of Lithuanian as the official language can protect it from decline. This status was first legitimised by the Constitution of the Lithuanian Republic adopted by the Constituent Seimas [Parliament] in August 1922, whose legal foundations were reconstructed in 1988.

When independence was restored in 1990 the primary concern was a more rapid integration of the nationals of the republic who did not speak Lithuanian. The government's stance towards the ethnic minorities has been very moderate compared to the policies applied in Latvia (see below). In 1990 the resolution "On the terms of the Official Language" passed by the Constituent Seimas stipulated that minimal requirements of the knowledge of the official languages were applied for executives and workers in the public sector until January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1995.

In 1995 the Law on the Official Language of the Republic of Lithuania and the Law on the Enforcement of the Official Language of the Republic of Lithuania were passed. The laws regulated the use of the official language in the main spheres of public life, its protection and control as well legal responsibility for violations of the language law.

This law recognises the Lithuanian language as the official language of the state: all records are kept in Lithuanian; the state guarantees that Lithuanian should be the language of education and instruction. All nationals of the Republic of Lithuania have the right to receive information and to be attended to in Lithuanian. The regulations on the official language are applied to public servants and teachers; to the workers of communications, transport and healthcare; policemen and shop assistances; to all those who have to deal with people.

The law also provides for the correct use of the official language: the mass media and publishers must adhere to the standardised norms.

The Law on the Official Language does not interfere with the use of languages of the ethnic minorities, mainly Russian, Polish, Belarusian and Yiddish, which are protected by the Law on the Ethnic Minorities of the Republic of Lithuania.

In the same year the government approved the Programme for the Use and Promotion of the Official Language in a period from 1996 to 2005. The programme consists of four chapters which provide for the most important work to be carried out in the following fields:

- studies of Lithuanian (create a computer database for the Academic Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language; work out and implement a programme for the creation of technical terms; write dictionaries and texts in dialects);

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- language promotion (introduce the teaching of correct use of Lithuanian and courses on technical terms in all special schools and schools of higher education; write new books and other means of teaching Lithuanian);
- use of the language (various organisational means are planned); and
- publication (books on theory and practical language: schoolbooks, dictionaries, monographs, bibliographical books; their computerised versions).

The resolutions passed by the Language Commission on the practical use of the language are obligatory to all institutions: offices, companies and organisations as provided by the Law on the Status of the State Lithuanian Language Commission passed by the Seimas in 1993.

The law empowers the Language Commission to deal with the issues of the codification, standardisation and the enactment of the Law on the Language. The Commission implements the language projects and is in charge of the use of the funds allotted by the government. The members of the Commission are appointed and dismissed by the Chairman of the Seimas on the nomination by the Seimas committees for Education, Science and Culture.

Resolutions passed by the Commission are obligatory for all enterprises offices and organisation all well as the mass media, violation of which incurs administrative responsibility. Many other laws of the Republic of Lithuania regulating different areas (laws on Education, Courts, Citizenship, Public Servants and others) include the requirements for the use of the official language.

One of the prerequisites of the intergration of Lithuania into the EU is the usability of the Lithuanian language along with the other languages of the EU. It can be achieved only with the help of modern informational technologies and joint efforts of researchers producing machine translation, speech recognition and generation systems for the Lithuanian language. With these aims in mind the program for 2000 – 2006 called as The Lithuanian Language in Information Society, has been prepared.

As regards Latvia, the language policy carried on by official authorities is certainly the most polemic of all the processes of language promotion in the Soviet successor states, especially if we take into account the ethnic composition of the republic.

**Table 4. Ethnodemographic composition of Latvia**

<b>Latvians</b>	<b>57.6</b>
<b>Russians</b>	29.6
<b>Belarusians</b>	4.1
<b>Ukrainians</b>	2.7
<b>Poles</b>	2.5
<b>Lithuanians</b>	1.4
<b>Jews</b>	0.4
<b>Roma</b>	0.3
<b>Germans</b>	0.2

Source: Latvian census of the year 2000

The implementation of rather restrictive language policy and citizenship law is due to the high level of linguistic assimilation among speakers of languages other than Latvian and Russian. For example, according to the year 2000 census only 2.1% of Belarusians, 3.7% of Ukrainians, 9.5% of Poles declared the respective languages as their native languages. The population census also shows that 62% of Latvia's inhabitants have indicated Latvian as native language, although Latvians are only 57,6% of population. 36,1% inhabitants of Latvia have indicated Russian as native tongue, although Russians are 29,6% of all inhabitants of Latvia. In Latvia representatives of minorities have more desire to identify themselves with Russian minority.

From the independence onwards, there has been a considerable progress in Latvian language skills among minorities. In 1989 census the Latvian language skills were declared by 18-20% of minority representatives. According to the 2000 Census 59% of Russians, 55% of Belarusians, 54% of Ukrainians, and 65% of Poles declared Latvian language skills. The number of minority representatives having no Latvian language skills at all is diminishing: 78-80% in 1989, 22% in 1996, 9% in 2000<sup>20</sup>.

After 50 years of incorporation into the USSR the independence of the Republic of Latvia (founded in 1918) was re-established in 1991. The 1922 Constitution is in force now including the article about the Latvian language as the official state language. In 1989 the first Language Law aimed to re-establish lost sociolinguistic functions of Latvian was adopted (with amendments in 1992). The Law on State Language adopted on 9 December 1999 is in force now. The purposes of the present Law are: the preservation, protection and development of the Latvian language, the integration of national minorities in the society of Latvia while observing their rights to use their mother tongue or any other language.

Nevertheless, after signing the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Ethnic Minorities in 1995, there is still in Latvia an ongoing political discussion on the ratification of this international instrument. Latvian Nationalistic party "For Fatherland and Freedom" has continually opposed the proposals put forward by pro-minority movements, whereas moderate parties tend to consider a possible ratification, due to international pressure, though with reservations.

Another example of the problems faced by minorities in Latvia is the fact that after the criticism for the unconstitutionality of the State Language Law from the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as from local human rights organizations, the Latvian government has introduced several changes previous to the law's effective implementation. These changes, which are insufficient according to these organizations, mainly deal with the categories of state language knowledge demanded to professionals and public authorities. The OSCE has already criticized the new regulation in considering it still runs counter to the Latvian constitution. Some of the criticism is specifically aimed at undermining the so-called administrative "latvianization", such as the official recognition of Latvian names and surnames, which, according to the

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<sup>20</sup> Baltic Data House, 2000

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OSCE, would not meet the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

## **6. CONCLUSION: STRATEGIES FOR A PEACEFUL AND BALANCED MANAGEMENT OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE SOVIET SUCCESSOR STATES**

The events taking place since 1991 in the Russian Federation and the Soviet successor states prove the absolute necessity of solving and preventing interethnic conflicts in order to guarantee a minimum level of well-being in the local populations and to satisfy their aspirations. In addition, it is also urgent to guarantee a correct management of the ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity so as to prevent violent vindications from spreading and interethnic conflicts in the periphery of the Russian Federation from multiplying<sup>21</sup>.

Some positive developments have to be stressed, as for example the signature by Russia on May 10th, of the Council of *Europe's European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages*, which is an important step involving a change of attitude toward the protection of the more than one hundred minority languages spoken in Russia. The great Russian linguistic diversity have been object of different seminars and meetings organized by the Council of Europe, aimed to grow the Russian Government's awareness about the importance of the protection of the European cultural heritage.

It is also worthnoting that on July 19, Moldova adopted a Law on Ethnic Minorities, as far as the multiethnic and multilingual situation in this country is a quite complex one since there exist six officially recognized minority groups (Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Jews, Bulgarian and Rom) which nearly make up half of the state's total population. The linguistic issue is neither an easy one: Russian was the official language for 45 years until, in 1989, Romanian (Moldovan) was again recognized as the state's official language following the approval of a "law on linguistic transition" (Law on the Functioning of Languages) which, although it was not generally refused by that time, it became increasingly criticized by the diverse groups in Moldova. The Moldovan constitution establishes in its 3rd article that the Moldovan language (with latin script) is the national language whereas the state respects and undertakes to promote Russian and the other languages spoken within its territory. It also envisages the regulation of this article by means of a law, although it has not been yet developed.

The recent developments in Azerbaijan are also rather encouraging: the republic has signed the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on June 26<sup>22</sup> and the document has come into force on October 1. Furthermore, the Parliament of Azerbaijan is preparing and discussing a new draft law which should define the legal basics for the protection of national minorities. The text guarantees the equality of rights and

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<sup>21</sup> Vitaly Ganiushin, a well-known Russian journalist, already warned that: "We have been able to survive the disappearance of the USSR, but we could not survive the disintegration of Russia" (*New Times*, 1993, n. 30).

<sup>22</sup> On January 21, Georgia also signed the Framework Convention.

freedoms for the individuals that belong to minority groups. The draft law's third article states that "no one shall be forced to change its ethnic affiliation", apart from stressing the fact that "the state will not permit any action aimed at forced assimilation of national minorities".

Nevertheless, there are still many controversial issues which can easily lead to the raising of new inter-ethnic conflicts. For example, on October 22, the Estonian Parliament decided not to discuss the amendments of the electoral laws which require a certain linguistic knowledge in both local and general spheres for candidates to occupy public posts. The opposition "People's Union" party has proposed to postpone the discussion whereas the Center Party has suggested that the Minister of Foreign Affairs should report on such amendments. These amendments are part of the Estonian actions aimed at convincing the OSCE, which has criticised its linguistic policy in their last report on this state

Consequently, it is fundamental to involve Russian linguistic and cultural minorities in the formulation, adoption, application and evaluation of protection policies, as well as policies fostering their rights at international, national and local levels. The effective participation of these communities constitutes a necessary element for a better management of the human, social and economic resources of the area, as well as for the exercise of a better control of the actions of the local governments in order to guarantee the equality of rights and the non-discrimination for all the parties involved. Obviously, the great variety of aspirations and the huge ethnic and cultural complexity of the area demand that the most suitable mechanisms to create the necessary conditions for stimulating a real and effective participation of the local populations in public affairs, according to the peculiarities of each of the Republics, are identified in the most rigorous and proper way. However, this participation will only be possible within a context that respects the universal values of human rights, including cultural, social and economic rights, as a *sine qua non* condition for the exercise of these and other rights. It is therefore extremely urgent, among other things, that the peripheral regions of Russia can begin to design and apply relevant strategies in the areas like the promotion of autochthonous languages and cultures, the construction of civil societies and the prevention of interethnic conflicts in order to guarantee the development of minority languages, the increase in economic activities and the improvement in living conditions, the strengthening of local social networks, the consolidation of some emergent civil societies and a sustainable local development. As I see it, the promotion of autochthonous languages and the strengthening of civil societies must mainly aim at increasing the relationships between democracy and national identity: the promotion of values such as tolerance, the setting-up of educational systems that disseminate messages of pacific cohabitation and mutual understanding, based more on cultural identities than on national identities, and the implementation of policies which stimulate local development constitute essential elements to reinforce the prevention of conflicts and the improvement of the well-being of the peripheral populations of Russia.

In short, fostering a peaceful cohabitation, an harmonic multiculturalism and a sustainable development are the main challenges that the regions of Russia have to face today, very specially those of the North Caucasus. In order to guarantee their development, credible and effective policies have to be set in motion so as to reinforce the links among the autochthonous populations and



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the European regions and institutions (very especially the European Union and the Council of Europe), as well as with the NGO's that may develop a twofold role as mediators and promoters to help the local social partners to design and apply flexible and realistic initiatives using their own resources. Only in this way may we help to prevent Russia and all the former Soviet republics from undergoing new wars such as those of Kosovo and Chechnya.

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