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The purpose of the journal is to promote scientific exchange and cooperation between Russian and foreign political scientists.

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RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE AS A FACTOR OF POLITICS

The problem of the spread of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space has long been a significant factor in politics. Russia uses it as one of the tools of its “soft power” and political influence in the former Soviet republics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, most of the new countries began to distance themselves from the Russian language, replacing it with national or English languages. In some countries, the status of the Russian language is not only undefined, but it is prohibited to use it. Although the Russian language is still a communication tool for national minorities and diasporas in the territories of the former Soviet Union, the new states see Russia’s policy of supporting the Russian language abroad as a threat to their national identity and national languages.

In this article, the authors set themselves the task of considering the current situation with the use of the Russian language in the post-Soviet countries. The authors hypothesize that the refusal to use the Russian language in the post-Soviet countries is caused by its value dominance. While the instrumentalization of language learning leads to an increase in the interest in it in Western countries. The article analyzes data on the use of the Russian language in everyday communication, education, and science. The authors demonstrate that the use of the Russian language also depends on the age and education of the population. At the same time, the Russian language is studied in West European countries,

and the authors provide data on the reasons why foreigners seek to learn it. The main challenges and threats that the Russian language faces in the post-Soviet space are identified. As a result, the authors conclude that Russia should move away from the value interpretation of the use of the Russian language in favor of its instrumentalization and show the benefits and advantages of the language as a means of intercultural communication in the post-Soviet space.

Key words: *Russian language, post-Soviet space, Russia, language policy, national identity.*

Language is an important tool for communication and promotion of the political agenda both at the public and international levels. Another important political function of the language is formation of the national identity and state building [6]. A country where the state language and the main language of communication claims to be an international language has a reason to play a leading role in the architecture of international relations or in a particular region. Due to the fact that Russia claims to increase its international status [16. Pp. 79-94] and its special role in the post-Soviet space [9. Pp. 109-114], the topic of the spread of the Russian language continues to be relevant in today's difficult geopolitical and international conditions for Russia.

It should be emphasized that the works of Russian and foreign authors published in recent years cover a wide range of issues close to this subject area [20; 7; 22; 8; 10. Pp. 100-111; 11; 19; 13. P. 111].

However, the problems of ethno-linguistic policy and the role of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space cannot be called unequivocally exhausted. Due to many objective circumstances, the study of this topic continues to maintain a high level of relevance.

Today, the Russian language cannot claim to be a universal language of international communication due to its insufficient prevalence and linguistic complexity, but it can be used as a regional language, primarily in the post-Soviet space. Earlier in the Soviet era, as part of the spread of socialist ideology around the world, there were attempts to make Russian a global language. In the 70s of the XX century, it was studied in 81 countries around the world [5]. Russian language lost its position and the younger generations in the CIS countries lost interest in it after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This signals about a serious threat to the status of the Russian language in the region. Russian language is still an important tool for uniting the Russian Diaspora and preserving the movement of compatriots who remained outside the borders of the Russian Federation after the collapse of the USSR.

It is worth noting that in Western Europe and America, students learn Russian, as they understand that it can help them in their career growth and personal development. The reasons for this choice, as will be shown later in the article,

are mostly pragmatic. Presumably, we can talk about two dimensions of the language – value and pragmatic. Our hypothesis is that the official policy of Russian language support by the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space is of a value-based nature, and the main difficulties of Russia's soft power policy in this direction are connected with such dimension. Russia positions the language more as a legacy of the common Soviet past and a part of historical memory, rather than as a tool for achieving the career and educational goals of residents of the former Soviet Union.

Language: the value vs a tool. The function of the language in relation to political processes can appear in at least two guises – value (when we are talking about the role of the language in the formation of national identity), and instrumental – as a means of communication. Russian language and everything Russian may seem to be facing an unequivocal rejection in the context of the conflict between Russia and Western countries that has been growing in intensity since 2008. However, as research by Western experts shows, this is not quite true – Russian is studied and used in an international environment. Problem mostly appear when the use of the Russian language “threatens” the formation of the national identity of the former Soviet republics, and in this area we should look for a compromise to maintain the status of the Russian language, while at the same time respecting the national identity of Russia's neighboring states.

Russian language as a tool. The Russian language has retained important attributes of influence on the international agenda. It is still the official language of the UN, the IAEA, and at the regional level – of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the EAEU, the CIS, and the CSTO. Students also study Russian as a foreign language in foreign countries, both in the West and in Asia. An interesting study was carried by Jason Merrill, who interviewed students studying Russian at the summer intensive program of Middleberry College from 1991 to 2011. He asked them about the reasons for studying Russian [14. P. 51-78]. Respondents chose the following answers first out of three possible ones.

As we can see, according to the study, career and access to knowledge (reading the authors in the original) are the most important reasons for the development of the Russian language by Western, American audiences. Another important reason is the interest in the Russian cultural heritage itself.

Among the career expectations that the surveyed students planned to use Russian were: diplomatic service abroad, education, civil service in their country (Department of Commerce, Justice, FBI, CIA, etc.), NGOs, business, humanitarian organizations, journalism and military service [14]. For Western countries, the study of the Russian language is of applied character, and we see a constant interest in it.

Russian language as a value. Previously, the Russian language was one of the tools for building empires – the Russian Empire and the USSR. It was the language of universal communication for the peoples of these multi-ethnic states.

Table 1

**Reasons of choosing Russian language
for studying among the students of Middlebury College**

Reasons for studying Russian Language	Percentage of those who put it first in the selection list	Percentage of those who put it first in the top three possibilities
I plan to use Russian in my career	15.8	38.6
I want to read Russian authors in the original	12	26.5
I am interested in Russian history	9.4	31
It sounds exotic	8.8	25.3
Sounds like fun	7.5	23.4
I wanted to expand my knowledge of the world	6.9	31
I wanted to go to Russia	5.6	25.3
I would like to work in Russia	4.4	18.9
I have friends in Russia	3.1	8.8
I chose a course because I didn't get to other courses	2.5	6.3
I would like to teach Russian history, culture, politics, or economics	1.8	5
I would like to teach Russian	1.2	5.6
I am of Russian origin	1.2	5.6
No specific reason	0.6	6.3

It was introduced as mandatory in the educational system during the tsarist and Soviet periods. In Soviet times, education was allowed only in 14 national languages, in addition to the main Russian [1]. Now the rejection of the Russian language becomes a kind of manifesto of the final break with the Imperial or Soviet past [3. P. 163-164]. Accordingly, the policy of promoting the Russian language abroad is perceived by post-Soviet countries as neo-Imperial. Some authors note that Russian language is used aggressively in rhetoric and politics, and the spread of the ideas of the “Russian world” is compared to the language policy of the former metropolis in relation to previously subject territories [17. P. 249-281].

At the same time, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, internal language problems in the republics (including the issue of the Russian – speaking population-for example, in Moldova and Ukraine) became the cause of the struggle for language rights and catalysts for national conflicts [12. Pp. 257-274]. According to the latest research by the Federal State Institution “Sociocenter,” Russian is the 10th most widely spoken language in the world, it is used in 27 countries by the totally about 235 million people (4). Russian language usage indicators in the CIS countries are slightly higher, according to the Agency, about 273 million people in the world use Russian for communication (3).

Russian is a native language for many citizens of post-Soviet countries, it retains its position in the information and cultural space and is used at the everyday level. Russian has the status of the state language in Belarus, and the official language in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Moldova has the right to preserve and develop the Russian language, and it is also the official language of Gagauzia. In Tajikistan, Russian is designated as the language of international communication. In the rest of the CIS countries and Georgia, the status of the Russian language is not defined. In Ukraine, in 2019, the Russian language was stripped of its status as a language of international communication, equating it to the languages of other national minorities.

Decisions regarding the status of the Russian language that have been made in recent years are often political in nature. Despite the majority of the population's fluency in Russian and the serious positions of Russian-speaking politicians in Ukraine during the years of independence, the current political elites perceive the course of European integration through the prism of the necessary break with the Imperial past and the restriction of cultural ties with Russia.

The indicators of the use of Russian in everyday communication among the population of the former USSR countries are noteworthy. A 2018 study (using a combined assessment of 2012-2017 data) within the framework of the "Eurasian monitor" project shows that Russian as a language of everyday communication dominates in Belarus and Kazakhstan. Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Armenia have lower rates. People with higher education in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan often use Russian in everyday communication, but this is not the case in Armenia.

Russian language for many residents of the post-Soviet space can be inscribed in their national identity in an atypical format: the fact that the Russian language is recognized as their native language does not mean that these residents belong to the Russian nation. Often, the Russian language retains a strong position among the narrow elite groups [21]. Knowledge of the Russian language in this case provides more opportunities for interaction with the Russian-speaking elites of other countries and directly in Russia itself. It also opens up opportunities for business cooperation.

Language is an important marker of ethnic and national identity, it is actively used as a factor in building national states and mobilizing national and ethnic identity [4. Pp. 39-54]. This role was largely played by the Russian language in the post-Soviet construction of the Russian Federation and the consolidation of all the peoples of Russia [18. P. 37-55]. However, if a state chooses the formula "one nation – one state – one language" for building a national idea, in particular, appealing to the national language and excluding the Russian language, this traditionally leads to serious internal problems and conflicts. Russia also sees these processes in the near abroad through the prism of its foreign policy interests: accordingly, any attempts to restrict the Russian language or switch to the Latin alphabet are perceived negatively, as an unfriendly step on the part of post-Soviet countries.

Education in Russian in the former Soviet Union is an experience of the instrumental approach. Russian language learning as a way to get free access to the prestigious diplomas of Russian universities and knowledge bases accumulated by Soviet and Russian scientific thought is one of the ways to increase the chances of spreading the Russian language in the post – Soviet countries. Mostly, Russian is studied in the CIS and Baltic countries (7.46 million people as of 2018), but there is a steady decline (for comparison, in 2005, 11.3 million people in the former Soviet Union studied Russian) (4) Latest tendencies also testify to the lack of language teachers (especially in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), and reduction of the hours allocated for studying the Russian language and literature (1). Russian universities have branches in all post-Soviet countries, with the exception of Turkmenistan. As of 2018, there were about 38 thousand students in all of them (2).

Table 2

**Russian language in the system of education
and science in the former USSR countries**

Country	Primary and secondary education	Higher education	Science
Azerbaijan	There is a “Russian sector,” education in the Russian language on request.	Bilingual education in Azerbaijani and Russian languages.	Dissertation may be defended in Russian.
Armenia	Obligatory as a foreign language. Russian schools are attached to diplomatic missions.	There are universities with Russian as the language of instruction.	Thesis may be defended in the Armenian language.
Belarus	Russian is studied as a second native language.	Russian and Belarusian are used in parallel.	Russian and Belarusian may be used in parallel.
Georgia	Russian is optional, and the number of Russian schools is decreasing.	Russian sectors have been opened in some universities.	Thesis may be defended only in Georgian, in another language – by special request.
Kazakhstan	Russian is a mandatory language of instruction at schools. More than a quarter of schools are taught in Russian.	The system is bilingual, and there are universities with Russian as the language of instruction.	Thesis may be defended in Russian.
Kyrgyzstan	Russian language is obligatory, but there is a trend in the reduction of hours. In 10% of schools, Russian is the language of instruction.	Training is available in Russian.	Thesis may be written and defended in Russian.

Moldova	Russian is excluded from the list of obligatory subjects. It is possible to study in Russian-language schools.	There are separate Russian-language universities.	Thesis may be defended in the national language only, in Russian – by special request.
Tajikistan	Mandatory study of the Russian language. Not enough teachers. There is a high demand for training in Russian.	Russian is allowed.	Thesis may be defended in Russian and passed through the Higher Attestation Commission of the RF.
Turkmenistan	Russian language is included in the program, there is one Russian school.	In Turkmen only.	–
Uzbekistan	Compulsory study of the Russian language, bilingual education.	The program provides for the study of the Russian language in primary courses, there are Russian-speaking groups in universities and Russian-speaking universities.	Thesis may be written and defended in Russian.
Ukraine	Parallel training in Russian and other languages of national minorities is allowed.	In the Ukrainian language only.	Thesis in Russian not allowed.

As of 2015, there were 4,236 general education public and private institutions in the CIS, Baltic States and Georgia that taught in Russian (according to national educational standards). In 2015, the total number of students studying in Russian in these countries amounted to 2.83 million. In total, 12.4 million citizens of the CIS, the Baltic States and Georgia studied in Russian in 2015. For comparison, in the 90s of XX century, the number of students studying in Russian in schools and higher educational institutions of the national republics of the USSR was 28.3 million people [2].

The trend of decreasing interest in the Russian language is related to the change of generations and reorientation more to the West than to the former capital of the USSR – Moscow. Also, Russia's language policy abroad, as well as the "soft power" policy in general, often work inertially, proceeding from the accumulated heritage and the Soviet base of cooperation – cultural communication societies abroad and friendship societies (later transformed into Russian centers of science and culture). The Russian language is often positioned as a tool for maintaining historical and cultural ties between post-Soviet countries that

remained after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but not as an opportunity for the development and career advancement.

Competition for the influence in the region with other countries is also a serious factor in reducing interest in the Russian language. Turkey is actively promoting its language agenda based on the common Turkic heritage, and China is thus introducing countries, it is interested in, to its culture, education, and economic projects.

Threats to the Russian language and reasons for the decline in the use of language in the former USSR. For systematization, among the main reasons for the decline in the language use, we highlight the following:

1. State policy of local elites aimed at ousting the Russian language.
2. Loss of interest in learning Russian among the population.
3. Lack of professional staff and resources for learning Russian.
4. No need to use the Russian language at the domestic and professional level.

The politicization of language and state policy aimed at limiting the use of the Russian language, as we noted above, is associated with the search for a national idea, the strengthening of national institutions in the post-Soviet states, and the fear of increasing Russian influence within society.

One of the serious problems and established trends in the post – Soviet space is the conflict between the Russian language and the languages of the titular nations of the post-Soviet states. As a result of efforts to form a national idea, the Russian language is being displaced from social, political and educational life. Special attention is also paid to “clearing” the country and urban space (linguistic landscape) of Russian-language inscriptions [15. P. 255].

There is also a romanization of the language space – romanization has already been carried out in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Moldova, and partially in Uzbekistan. Now Kazakhstan has started the process of romanization. In addition to romanization, countries also use the method of replacing Russian with English (sometimes Turkish) [15]. Russian laws on the romanization of state languages and restrictions on the use of national minority languages (including Russian), and the exclusion of Russian from the list of mandatory languages to study (see tab. 2) put the Russian language in a vulnerable position.

However, the language itself can rarely act as an independent value. Most often, it is an applied tool that provides access to other valuable knowledge and benefits. The reasons why Russian can be studied in the post-Soviet countries are: getting a high-quality education, a prestigious high-paying job, communicating with business partners, informal communication with friends, access to cultural artifacts and other valuable information. Russian is less useful for those who want to fit in with the European or Asian community, in this case, English, Chinese or Turkish are more likely to be needed.

In this regard, we assume that reformatting the Russian language as an applied tool for access to careers, education, and business can be a factor that will encourage residents of the post-Soviet countries to study it.

Russian language demand in the post-Soviet space directly depends on the need to contact Russian-speaking citizens or representatives of other post-Soviet countries, study or work in other CIS countries, move to Russia, read professional and scientific literature in Russian, and become familiar with Russian culture. The more active communication and interaction at the civil and everyday level with Russia and the residents of the post-Soviet countries with each other, the stronger the position of the Russian language in the region will be.

The lack of knowledge of the Russian language by the population of the former USSR, in turn, leads to another serious risk – a reduction in cooperation between the residents of the post-Soviet countries and the EEU, a lack of integration from below, and a possible transition to English-language communication between the citizens of post-Soviet states.

Russian speakers could be motivated by economic, educational, and career opportunities that would open up to native speakers of the Russian language. Russian language programs and equipment are required in many post – Soviet countries not to learn Russian from scratch, but to maintain and improve the existing level of Russian language proficiency. In this regard, it is important to build a targeted promotion policy.

Russian language promotion is an important factor and tool for creating a comfortable learning environment: online platforms and courses, mobile applications and software for teaching Russian, grant competitions and educational programs for Russian speakers, opening centers, libraries and multimedia classes in places of demand, as well as in an online format. Thus, the Russian language is a serious factor in domestic politics and building national identity, and it often becomes a cause of internal strife. Of a particular importance is the unifying potential of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space, which can be used positively both within the framework of integration structures and to preserve the channel of effective communication between the population of post-Soviet countries. The level of Russia's influence and understanding of its intentions by other countries in the region depends to a high degree on the position of the Russian language and its preservation as a basis for mutual understanding.

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(4) The number of students learning Russian language in the world has fallen two times since the collapse of the USSR // RBC 28.11.2019 // <http://www.rbc.ru/society/28/11/2019/5ddd18099a79473d0d9b0ab1>.

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