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CALL FOR MORE EDUCATION AND PUBLICATIONS IN RUSSIAN
IN THE NON-RUSSIAN REPUBLICS

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The declared aim of current Soviet nationalities policy in the sphere of language is the achievement of what is termed universal "national-Russian bilingualism." Put in simpler language, this means that Moscow wants all members of the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union to be fluent in Russian as well as in their own languages.¹ The strenuous efforts made by the Party and government over the years to promote a knowledge of Russian among the non-Russian nationalities are often perceived by members of these nationalities, as well as by observers outside the Soviet Union, as a policy of linguistic russification. This interpretation is vehemently rejected in the Soviet press, which maintains that the spread of Russian poses no threat to the non-Russian languages. The fears of members of the non-Russian nationalities that Moscow's ultimate aim is, in fact, to phase out the use of their languages in favor of Russian are likely to be reinforced, however, by an article that appeared recently in Sovetskaya Estoniya. Its author, Mikhail N. Guboglo, calls for the provision of more education and for more publications and broadcasts in Russian for the bilingual population of non-Russian nationality in the Union-republics.²

Guboglo, who has written extensively on questions of bilingualism and contemporary ethnolinguistic processes in the Soviet Union, works at the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences. In addition, he was in 1980-82, and probably still is, academic secretary of the Scientific Council of the USSR Academy of Sciences for Nationality Problems, which was set up to provide the Party with advice on nationality matters. He first advocated that society should regulate not only knowledge but also

1. Fluent knowledge by a Russian of a non-Russian language of one of the peoples of the Soviet Union as well as Russian is termed "Russian-national bilingualism."

2. Sovetskaya Estoniya, February 26, 1985.

the use of Russian at a conference on nationality relations held in Baku in May, 1981, but not all the participants agreed that such regulation was either feasible or advisable.³

Guboglo's advocacy of a more aggressive language policy, including his recent article in Sovetskaya Estoniya, naturally needs to be seen in the context of the current level of national-Russian bilingualism. At the outset it should be stated that he is clearly concerned mainly with the situation in the non-Slav Union republics. National-Russian bilingualism is already well on the way to being achieved in the RSFSR, the Ukraine, and Belorussia. In most of the autonomous republics, oblasts, and okrugs of the RSFSR, the indigenous population has, purportedly at the wish of parents, been receiving much or all of its schooling in Russian since the end of the 1950s. Many Ukrainian children in the Ukraine and, in particular, Belorussian children in Belorussia likewise receive their education in Russian. It is, of course, relatively easy for Ukrainians and Belorussians to learn Russian because of its affinity with their own languages. Knowledge and use of Russian is therefore widespread among all these non-Russian nationalities.

The picture is very different in most of the other Union republics, particularly those of Transcaucasia and Central Asia, where only a quarter to a third of the indigenous population claimed to have a good command of Russian in 1979.⁴ In most of the non-Slav republics, the overwhelming majority of children of the indigenous nationalities attend native-language schools, and in the Baltic and Transcaucasian republics most native students also receive their higher education in their mother tongue. It is true that Russian occupies a very important place in the curriculum of all non-Russian schools, but there are limits to what the schools could achieve even if the teaching were much better than it often is. Genuine bilingualism is much more likely to result from everyday interethnic contacts, and here the authorities are facing a deteriorating situation in all the southern republics that goes some way to negating their efforts to improve the teaching of Russian in non-Russian schools.

In most of the capitals of the Union republics and in many of the other large industrial towns, there has long been a very

3. A. A. Susokolov, "Vsesoyuznaya nauchnaya sessiya 'XXVI s"ezd KPSS i zadachi izucheniya natsional'nykh otnoshenii v SSSR,'" Sovetskaya etnografiya, No. 2, 1982, p. 114.

4. See the table at the end of RL 18/82, "Why Shouldn't Russians Learn the Vernacular?" January 14, 1982. It is true that a much higher figure (53.3 percent) was claimed for Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, but this figure is highly suspect.

sizable Russian presence. This presence has created a Russian-language environment that has played a major role in the spread of national-Russian bilingualism among the native population in the towns. In recent years, however, in all the southern republics (Transcaucasia, Central Asia, Kazakhstan) the Russian presence has declined in relative importance, and in Georgia and Azerbaijan absolutely. In all these republics, a birth rate far higher among the indigenous than among the immigrant Slav population, combined with the out-migration of Slavs (or in the case of Armenia, the in-migration of Armenians), has led to the population, and hence the linguistic environment, becoming markedly more "native." In the Georgian capital Tbilisi, for instance, whereas only every second inhabitant regarded Georgian as his native tongue in 1959, two out of three did so by 1979.⁵

As Soviet scholars have noted, the generally higher birth rate among the indigenous nationalities in the non-Slav republics has also had what are, from Moscow's point of view, undesirable consequences in the sphere of school enrollments. Between 1965 and 1972, in eleven of the twelve non-Slav Union republics (the exception was Estonia) the number of pupils attending native-language schools increased proportionately faster than the number attending Russian-language schools, and in two of them--Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan--the number studying in Russian-language schools actually declined by 9.1 and 5.2 percent, respectively.⁶ This trend has continued in the Central Asian republics at least. Whereas in the school year 1967-68 there were 1,805,254 children (68.9 percent of the total school population) attending Uzbek-language schools in Uzbekistan, by the school year 1983-84 the figure had soared to 3,155,000 (77.5 percent of the total). In contrast, although the Russian population increased over the same period, the number of children attending Russian-language schools dropped--admittedly only marginally in absolute terms (from 568,583 to 555,000), but much more significantly in terms of their share of total school enrollments (from 21.7 to 13.6 percent).⁷

5. See RL 396/81, "Georgian Language Holds Its Own in Georgia," October 5, 1981.

6. M. N. Guboglo, Sovremennye etnoyazykovye protsessy v SSSR, Moscow, 1984, p. 140. Over the same period, the number of children attending schools with instruction in the language of the indigenous nationality declined by 6.2 percent in the Ukraine and by no less than 14.2 percent in Belorussia.

7. Yu. D. Desheriev, Zakonomernosti razvitiya literaturnykh yazykov narodov SSSR v sovetskuyu epokhu, Moscow, 1976, p. 117; I. B. Uzmenkhodzhaev, "Leninskaya natsional'naya politika KPSS i dal'neishee razvitie natsional'nykh otnoshenii v usloviyakh

Another factor that has provided less favorable conditions for the spread of national-Russian bilingualism in some republics in recent years has been an expansion of the functions of the native language. Whereas in the past the lack of educated native personnel and the inadequate development of the local languages in these republics created a situation where Russians, and hence the Russian language, occupied a dominant position in the administration, in higher education, and in industry, rising standards of education among the indigenous population in the last two or three decades, accompanied by a development of the vernacular to cope with the demands of modern life, have worked to the detriment of Russian. Guboglo has noted, for instance, that the development of education in Moldavia led to the native language becoming an effective means of communication in more and more spheres of activity in Moldavia. He continued:

This partially explains why in the 1960s, particularly in the latter half, there was a certain reduction in the degree of national-Russian bilingualism achieved earlier. Drawing the relevant conclusions, the republican Party organization and local organs of education started in 1970 to pay very serious attention to improving the teaching of Russian in the Moldavian school.⁸

Finally, when enumerating the circumstances working against the spread of Russian, the subjective factor--that is, the willingness or otherwise of members of the non-Russian nationalities to use the language--cannot be entirely discounted. The clearest evidence of a reluctance to use Russian comes from Estonia. The regime's all-out promotion of Russian, together with unrestricted Slav immigration into the republic, have made Estonians fear for the future of their language and, indeed, of their nation. This, surely, rather than any real drop in bilingualism, is the reason why the number of Estonians in Estonia claiming a good knowledge of Russian as a second language actually dropped between the censuses of 1970 and 1979 from 254,842 (27.5 percent) to 218,564 (23.1 percent), although the Estonian population increased by 22,655. Soviet sources have also noted that Russian immigration has not always led to increased interethnic contacts in Estonia. On the new housing estates in Tallinn, for instance, the children

zrelogo sotsializma," *Voprosy filosofii*, No. 9, 1984, p. 11. The remainder were attending Kazakh-, Tajik-, Karakalpak-, Turkmen-, and Kirgiz-language schools.

8. Guboglo, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-50.

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are said to band together in the main according to their language affiliation.⁹

Against this background, and in light of what Moscow, for political, economic, and military reasons, sees as an imperative--that all its citizens should be fluent in Russian--it is only to be expected that calls should be made for a more activist language policy. The underlying message of Guboglo's recent article in Sovetskaya Estoniya is that the promotion of national-Russian bilingualism cannot be confined to the teaching of Russian in non-Russian schools. Non-Russians must be made to use Russian more widely by some reduction in what is now available to them in their native language in the way of education and the media. The topic is, of course, too sensitive for Guboglo to present it quite so crudely. His article, which appears under the rubric "Questions of Theory," is subtitled "Perfecting the Language Model of the Period of Developed Socialism" and is written in the appropriate scientific language, laced with a good deal of euphemism and circumlocution.

According to Guboglo, the language model of the period of developed socialism is national-Russian bilingualism, based on "concern for the functional development of the native languages of the peoples of the USSR and, at the same time, a desire to create conditions for the dissemination of the Russian language among them." Guboglo notes that national-Russian bilingualism is becoming a mass phenomenon but argues that there is nevertheless scope for improvement, even among the relatively highly educated. Attention is constantly being paid to improving the study of Russian in schools and other educational institutions, he says, yet the stimulation of competence in and active use of both the native language and Russian "cannot be limited by the framework of the school sphere but should be conducted more broadly, embracing all the other subsystems of the Socialist way of life as well, above all the sphere of the production, social-political, and cultural activity of Soviet people."

Since the chief areas where the authorities can exercise some degree of control over the use of language are publishing, the media, and education, it is not surprising that these are the specific areas in which Guboglo suggests that Russian should be more widely used. Among his contentions are that:

- 1) all the peoples of the USSR are interested in seeing book publishing in Russian grow faster than book publishing in the non-Russian languages, since Russian-language book production "serves both the national and internationalist

9. Sovetskaya Estoniya, November 27, 1984.

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- (internatsional'nye) interests of the new historical community [i.e., the Soviet people]";
- 2) publishing houses in the Union republics need to improve their publishing policy to take account of growing bilingualism. At present, "in a number of republics, works that are known to be artistically and scientifically weak are sometimes included in publishing plans only because they are written in the national language;"
 - 3) "artificial inflation of the social functions of the native languages at the level of what is made available (predlozhenie)--that is, at the level of publishing books in the national languages, of the work of the mass media, and of teaching in the school and higher educational system"--creates privileges for the national languages at the expense of Russian that are not justified by the new needs of the bilingual population and are in conflict with Leninist principles and the constitution; and
 - 4) with the increase in the number of non-Russians fluent in Russian, a situation has arisen in which "the needs of the bilingual population of non-Russian nationality for general education and vocational-technical schools, technical colleges, and higher education institutions with Russian as the medium of instruction are not being fully met; there is insufficient local (republican) literature published in Russian, and there is a shortage of Russian-language radio and TV broadcasts.¹⁰ In some instances, the translation of books into the national languages and the dubbing of films is becoming a goal in itself and does not correspond with the needs of the bilingual population."

Guboglo ends his article with some remarks about the need to correlate linguistic needs--that is, a non-Russian's need for his native language and for Russian--with the existing ethnolinguistic situation and what is ideally necessary. In this connection, he points out that linguistic policy is tied in with social policy inasmuch as all non-Russians need good Russian if the country is to solve its labor supply problem--in other words, get the surplus manpower in the southern republics to move north and west. Almost as an afterthought, Guboglo adds:

At the same time, the complex approach to national-Russian bilingualism does not

10. Viewers almost everywhere in the USSR can already receive two programs from Moscow in Russian!

tolerate one-sidedness. It is necessary that both Russians and representatives of other nationalities resident in the republics should have every chance to study the language of the indigenous nationality. This makes it possible to use them more actively in all sectors of the economy and also to facilitate a further improvement in the climate of inter-national (mezhnatsional'nye) contacts and a strengthening of the friendship and brotherhood of peoples.

This sentiment is in line with the recommendations of an all-Union conference on patriotic and international upbringing held in Riga in June, 1982, but there is little sign of any action being taken in this direction except in Estonia (and that predated the conference.)¹¹

The ideas put forward by Guboglo are not entirely novel. Leokadiya M. Drobizheva, a colleague of Guboglo's at the Institute of Ethnography, suggested back in 1969 that non-Russians should read more and more in Russian, and Mikhail I. Kulichenko of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, writing in 1976, appeared to think that a decision to counteract the rapid increase in the number of children attending non-Russian schools was justified.¹² Moreover, some steps have already been taken to limit the use of the non-Russian languages. Professor Roman Szporluk has documented how, since about 1976, the authorities have been following a deliberate policy of restricting the circulation of newspapers and journals in languages other than Russian, while promoting unrestricted growth of the Russian press.¹³ A directive issued by the USSR Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education in 1978 called for lectures in certain disciplines and written work to be carried out more often in Russian.¹⁴ The teaching of individual subjects in Russian in the non-Russian school is actively encouraged. Whether Guboglo's article signifies that these efforts are to be taken a stage further or merely reflects his personal views remains to be seen.

11. See RL 18/82.

12. Quoted by Roman Szporluk in RL Supplement 2/84, "Recent Trends in Soviet Policy Towards Printed Media in the Non-Russian Languages," November 7, 1984.

13. Ibid.

14. See RL 120/79, "New Measures to Improve the Teaching of Russian in the Union Republics," April 17, 1979.

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There could be a very specific reason why Guboglo's article was published in Estonia. In Guboglo's view, Estonia is undoubtedly the republic where the native language is in the most privileged position and therefore a prime target for his suggested redressing of the balance with Russian. Estonia has by far the highest level of books published in the native language per head of native population of any republic.¹⁵ Per-capita Estonian-language newspaper circulation is also very high. Guboglo noted earlier that ethnosociological surveys made at the beginning of the 1970s showed that no less than 90 percent of urban Estonians aged eighteen and nineteen read only Estonian-language materials (compared with 81.6 percent of those over sixty).¹⁶ Commenting on the high rate of increase in per-capita book publication in Estonian in that republic between 1959 and 1980 and the drop in the proportion of Estonians claiming a good knowledge of Russian between the censuses of 1970 and 1979, Guboglo said:

It is legitimate to ask: "Is there not a connection between...the tendency for the output of books in the language of the indigenous nationality to go up and the tendency for the degree of national-Russian bilingualism to decline (however slightly)?"¹⁷

Many Russians in Estonia would probably share Guboglo's views. Estonia is the only republic where articles about the need for the immigrant population to learn the indigenous language regularly appear in the Russian-language press. Adult courses in Estonian are always said to be oversubscribed, mainly, it is to be assumed, because sufficient of the immigrant population regard a knowledge of Estonian as indispensable in their jobs. A recent article in Literaturnaya gazeta cited a Russian factory director and local deputy in Tallinn as saying that an elementary knowledge of Estonian had helped him in his work as a deputy. It also stated that the Ministry of Light Industry had established that lack of Estonian was one of the main reasons why young specialists from outside the republic did not stay.

15. See Table 2 in RL 204/84, "Belorussian Scholar Upholds Importance of Nationhood and National Languages," May 23, 1984.

16. Guboglo, op. cit., p. 166.

17. Ibid., p. 161.

18. Literaturnaya gazeta, February 20, 1985.