

Hegemonic Project or Survival Strategy?

Language Rights in the Former Soviet Space

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Introduction

The Soviet Union's collapse brought to surface a complex ethno-political situation in the territory it formerly spanned. Changes in interstate boundaries separated various ethnic populations from their perceived homelands. This post-Soviet landscape has created policy dilemmas for the Russian government, as some 25 million Russians found themselves living outside the borders of the Russian Federation. How Russian leaders have dealt with issues pertaining to its 'compatriots' in the non-Russian Soviet successor states has become a subject of interest to Western observers. In particular, Western analysts have been observing the expression of 'ethnic diaspora' issues in Russian foreign policy.

This study examines the extent to which Russian foreign policy concerns on the rights of 'compatriots,' particularly in terms of language status, can be used as a political tool to gain leverage in the 'Near Abroad,' especially in the western post-Soviet space. The western post-Soviet space, in this paper, refers to the Baltic states,² as well as two members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Ukraine and Moldova.³ These states represent a region where East-West competition for regional influence clashes. Russian foreign policy goals on the language debate can thus serve as a partial indicator of how Russia attempts to cope with international challenges to its perceived 'sphere of influence.'

¹ This working paper is prepared as part of the work undertaken by the author in an internship at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs. Many thanks to Arkady Moshes, Katri Pynnöniemi, Sinikukka Saari and Vadim Kononenko for their insightful comments on drafts of this paper. Thank you, also, to Pernilla Wasström, and the rest of the staff at the FIIA for supporting this work.

² This paper will only discuss the situation of the Russian linguistic minority in Estonia and Latvia, as this issue is not as prominent in Lithuania, where the Russian-speaking minority is not as large as in the other two Baltic states. Although language and minority policies differ slightly between Estonia and Latvia, this paper will treat these two states under one analysis, as the trajectories in both states follow a similar path.

³ Belarus, as the third member of the western CIS, also factors prominently into Russia's foreign policy plans. However, Belarus will not be discussed in this paper, as Russian is one of the state languages in Belarus, and the language is so widely used in this country's public life that there have been no concerns raised over the status of the Russian language in this country.

This paper argues that while Russia's active foreign policy role in demanding linguistic rights for Russian-speaking communities in the former Soviet republics should be viewed as an attempt to cope with its changing status in the international system. It should not be construed as a viable foreign policy tool for gaining political leverage in the post-Soviet space. Although Russia during the early years after the Soviet system's disintegration, especially during Boris Yeltsin's first presidential term, displayed tendencies to link the rights of Russians in the 'Near Abroad' to broader security issues, this foreign policy strategy no longer has a central role. The changing political environment that resulted from gradual stabilization in the western part of the post-Soviet space has led to changing foreign policy priorities on the Russian agenda. Russia, in recent years, has placed emphasis on more pressing security and economic issues, such as secessionist conflicts, terrorism, and energy. The Russian diasporas themselves have not been successful in serving as "independent actors exerting influence on homeland foreign policies,"⁴ rendering futile any attempts to use minority rights as a political tool. Thus, rather than continuing to tackle the political dimensions of the language debate without concrete results, Russia has shifted its focus on this issue to the cultural and identity dimensions.

Nonetheless, Russia is unlikely to completely backtrack from its mission of helping Russian minorities safeguard language rights in the 'Near Abroad' in the immediate future. Doing so would be tantamount to admitting that Russia has lost the battle for determining the future of its 'compatriots' residing in the former Soviet territories. Russia's foreign policy concerns for language rights should thus be conceived as symbolic way for Russia to assert its claim over the fate of its ethnic kin abroad. Russia's ability to tend to its compatriots' problems is important for the state, as it attempts to deal with identity issues after the Soviet Union's demise.

Diaspora, defined by Gabriel Sheffer as a "social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries,"⁵ can have a significant impact on international relations in several ways. Diasporas have the potential to serve as political conduits for conflict and

⁴ Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 57 (Summer 2003), 451.

⁵ Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

intervention. They also serve as potential lobbyists in their places of domicile.⁶ The international community, with its preference for inclusion, is increasingly concerned over the rights of groups that consider themselves as a national minority. Prominent international organizations, such as the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), stress respect for minority rights as part of their criteria for membership.

In the former Soviet Union, the ethnic composition of any given state is intricately complicated, due to the region's history. Each state has a number of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers who, collectively, can be regarded as an ethno-national diaspora. In some instances, this diaspora sees itself as territorially and politically linked with the Russian Federation, and look towards Russia, as a kin state, to take some responsibility for their welfare. In other instances, the diaspora views itself as an integrated part of the host society, but still considers itself as an extension of the Russian nation abroad. Questions regarding the rights of ethnic minorities thus have relevance in inter-state relations in the post-Soviet space.

This paper will draw its conclusion from case studies in the Baltic states, Ukraine, and Moldova. These cases differ in terms of the nature of their respective ethnic balance, their policy outlook, and their relationship with the Russian Federation. The Baltic states, being part of the Western European democratization project, pose different policy dilemmas for Russia from Ukraine and Moldova. Because Estonia and Latvia have joined both the European Union and NATO, Russian foreign policy has a different impact on these countries in comparison to CIS member states. Ukraine and Moldova, in contrast, as members of the CIS, have a much more complicated and intricate relationship with the Russian Federation. With regards to these countries, “ethno-national, historical, cultural and political-ideological factors constitute key elements of Russian policy-making.”⁷ Because Russia deals with CIS member states through bilateral channels, it is important to note differences in the way Russia relates to Ukraine and Moldova. All three cases, though diverse in their circumstances, illustrate tendencies in Russian foreign policy to draw attention to the language question.

⁶ Shain and Barth, 449-450.

⁷ Irina Kobrinskaya, “The CIS in Russian Foreign Policy: Causes and Effects,” in Hanna Smith, ed., *Russia and its Foreign Policy* (Helsinki: Kikumora Publications, 2005), 77.

Minority Rights, Language, and Russian Foreign Policy Rationale

The Russian Federation's interest in the well-being of the russophone minority living outside Russia's borders can be framed within an international context. In the late 1980s and 1990s, international organizations have put a greater emphasis on minority rights as a human rights dimension. Minority rights have since been included as part of the criteria for joining organizations such as the EU and NATO. These standards imply that states have a more legitimate claim for taking interest in the fate of their ethnic diasporas.⁸ International organizations' concerns for minority rights have, in the Russian government's view, legitimized its international lobby for the rights of Russians living in the former Soviet republics.

Minority rights, however, when referring to an ethnic context, pose significant problems for Russian policy rhetoric. As the Russian Federation itself is a multi-national, multi-linguistic entity, an ethnically based motivation for the state to claim interest over ethnic Russians in other states is paradoxical, and raises risks for Western accusations of 'Great Russian chauvinism.' Additionally, as literature on Russian diaspora politics shows, the terminology is at best ambiguous. Sven Simonsen defines the term *sootechestveniki* as denoting those who holding citizenship of the Russian federation. He uses the term *etnicheskie rossiyane* to refer simultaneously to ethnic Russians and all those who claim Russia as their homeland. Neither of these terms covers the geographical range of the Soviet Union's direct sphere of influence. These terms do not account for the russified Ukrainians and Belarusians who do not hold Russian citizenship.⁹ The term *russkoyazychnye* (Russian speakers), as defined by Christiano Codagone, can refer to individuals who use the Russian language as their mother tongue, regardless of whether or not they declare Russian as their nationality.¹⁰ These concepts as interpreted by Simonsen and Codagone, however, are not entirely conclusive, as there is no consensus among Russian scholars on the exact meaning of these terms. Nonetheless, the occurrence of language in terminology to classify the the Russian diaspora has its

⁸ Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, "Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Eurasia," *International Security* 24:3 (Winter 1999/2000), 112.

⁹ Sven Gunnar Simonsen, "Compatriot Games: Explaining the 'Diaspora Linkage' in Russia's Military Withdrawal from the Baltic States," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53:5 (July 2003), 774.

¹⁰ Christiano Codagone, "New Migration and Migration Politics in Post-Soviet Russia," Ethnobarometer Programme Working Paper No. 2, Part 2.3.1. <http://www.cemes.org/current/ethpub/ethnobar/wp2/wp2-g.htm>

significance. The politicization of Russian language rights thus legitimizes Russia's interest in a wider geographical range. Language is thus a specific dimension of ethnic linkage in Russian foreign policy.

The Russian Federation's concern for compatriots living in the 'Near Abroad' has indeed been a crucial part of its foreign policy. Language status, in particular, has been a salient issue for the Russian government, as the Soviet successor states' policies concerning language affect a much wider range of former Soviet citizens besides ethnic Russians, and have a clear socio-economic impact on these people. Russian-speakers living in the non-Russian successor states found their mother tongue no longer in use as the official language of their country of domicile. Instead, they faced new challenges in adjusting to public life in their state's titular language. Both the Yeltsin and Putin administrations have stressed the importance of defending the use of the Russian language. Both administrations have expressed their criticism of the Soviet successor states' treatment of the Russian-speaking minority through international channels. Igor S. Ivanov, former Foreign Minister of Russia, explains that "Russian embassies around the world are frequently called on to intervene when our cultural groups run into difficulty or have problems with foreign partners who are less than conscientious."¹¹ This is especially more so in the post-Soviet space, where Russia has an important stake in the socio-economic well-being of Russian speakers. Recent media commentaries still touch upon the language issue. An editorial in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* suggests that Russia should do everything possible to ensure that those interested in opportunities to master the Russian language should be afforded the occasion to do so.¹²

Officially, Russian policy seeks to "be active in the legal defense of the Russian language in the CIS and Baltic countries," and to "rule out cases of discrimination of the Russian language, and still better to give it...an official status."¹³ In a 2002 foreign ministry statement, Foreign Minister Ivanov stated that Russian diplomacy cannot be indifferent to the position of (Russian as a) native language in the bordering countries. He claims a priority direction in foreign policy involves improving diplomatic efficiency in

¹¹ Igor S. Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy* (Washington: Nixon Centre and Brookings Institution Press, 2002), 156.

¹² Yuri Prokhorov, "Poteryat' legche, chem. Naiti," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 27.11.2006.

¹³ I.S. Ivanov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2003), quoted in "Compatriots in Neighboring and Distant Countries," *International Affairs* 49:3 (2003), 171.

strengthening the position of the Russian language in the world.¹⁴ According to M.E. Shvydkoi, Minister of Culture in 2003, it is important to maintain the right to be educated in one's native language, "because it is the rule in the European community."¹⁵ These foreign policy statements frame the language status issue as a question of human rights.

Russia's interest in the Russian language's status outside of the country's border raises fundamental questions on state sovereignty. While the Russian government views itself as the rightful protector of its 'ethnic kin' abroad, this attitude, when transformed into policy, calls into question the right of one state to interfere in the affairs of another. Russia's vocal accusations of another state's treatment of Russian speakers have created a negative impression of Russia pursuing a 'neo-imperialist' drive.¹⁶ Governments of the Soviet successor states, in turn, have accused Russia of exercising chauvinistic policies and interfering with their own domestic affairs. The language issue has continually marred relations between Russia and the governments of the former Soviet republics because it touches upon the sensitive issue of sovereignty.

Furthermore, the language debate has raised concerns that Russian leaders intend to use the language issue as a tool to assert dominance over the post-Soviet state. Oles Smolansky argues that as Russia's attempts in the early 1990s to develop closer relations with the West failed to provide desired results, Russian foreign policy has tried to re-exert its imperial influence over the former Soviet republics.¹⁷ Alexander Motyl, in assessing the likelihood of Russia's 'creeping re-imperialization' of the post-Soviet space, points out several trends in support of this possibility. He predicts that the disparities in power and economic capacity will likely draw Russia and its neighbours closer together. As many of the non-Russian successor states are economically dependent on Russia, Russian leaders will have a greater urge to wield their influence over their neighbours. Motyl provides the example of Russia imposing sanctions on Latvia in 1998 over the latter's alleged discrimination against Russian minorities.¹⁸ Given these trends, it

¹⁴ "K chitateliyu doklada 'Russkii yasyk v mire,'" Departament informatzii i pechati, Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiikoi federatzii (MIDRF), 21.2.2002. <http://www.ln.mid.ru/Ns-dksu.nsf/arh/432569F10031DCE643256C1B004161EB?OpenDocument>

¹⁵ "Compatriots in Neighboring and Distant Countries," 172.

¹⁶ Simonsen, 771.

¹⁷ Oles M. Smolansky, "Ukraine and Russia: An Evolving Marriage of Inconvenience," *Orbis* 48:1 (Winter 2004), 117.

¹⁸ Alexander Motyl, *Revolutions, Nations, and Empires: Conceptual Limits and Theoretical Possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 157-158.

appears obvious that Russia's concerns for 'compatriots' abroad serve as a smoke screen for dominating the Soviet successor states.

While it is tempting to characterize Russian foreign policy interests in language rights outside its state borders as a blatant attempt to take on a re-imperialization project, such an assumption must be scrutinized. Russia's foreign policy does not explicitly project the idea of Russia as the continuation of the Soviet Union, but as a new state with specific interests "vis-à-vis a territorially dislocated nation."¹⁹ The rationale behind the Russian foreign policy stance on language rights in the former Soviet Union reflects how Russia has attempted to cope with having a 'territorially dislocated nation.'

Foreign policy concerns over language status in the Near Abroad can be interpreted as a result of the political elites' attempt to come to terms with a 'Russian' identity in the ensuing chaos of the Soviet Union's collapse. This issue is intrinsically linked to nationalism. The collapse of the Soviet Union and dismantling of the Russian nation needed to be rectified. As Elenora Mitrofanova argues, "Russia's concern for the rights and freedoms of its compatriots abroad is by no means dictated by the conditions of the political moment. It is Russia's strategic foreign policy choice, which is part and parcel of the country's internal transformation."²⁰

Case studies

Russian foreign policy's responses to the language issue in various parts of the western post-Soviet space illustrate the state's attempts to re-define its regional role. This following section highlights the direction of Russian foreign policy on the language question in the Baltic states, Ukraine, and Moldova.

Baltic States: Estonia and Latvia

In the Baltic states, particularly in Latvia and in Estonia, the presence of a large russophone minority is a specific Soviet legacy that has contributed to policy problems after independence. The majority of the Russian population in these countries had been

¹⁹ King and Melvin, 120.

²⁰ Elenora Mitrofanova, "The Russian World without Borders," *Russia in Global Affairs* 2:1 (2004), 93. Mitrofanova was the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation in 2004.

relocated there during the Soviet era. Although the titular languages in these territories remained a state language *de jure*, Russian became the *de facto* administrative language as more Russian-speaking migrants moved to these territories. As Uldis Ozolins elaborates, the influx of monolingual Russian speakers who expected to work and be served in Russian created a situation where locals felt the imperative to learn Russian in order to work with the newcomers. This scenario placed the obligation to become bilingual on the local population, while Russian speakers continued to be monolingual.²¹ As a result, when Latvia and Estonia seceded from the Soviet Union and established their titular languages as their sole working languages, the russophones found themselves at a disadvantage.

In the early 1990s, Russian President Boris Yeltsin's administration demonstrated the intention to exert pressure on Estonia and Latvia through political linkage. Russian foreign policy made the withdrawal of Russian troops from these countries contingent on these state governments' promise to uphold the socio-economic rights, which undoubtedly included a linguistic dimension, of their sizable Russian-speaking populations. To the Estonian and Latvian governments, such a bold move represented an attempt by Russia to dominate the former Soviet Republics. The West deemed this move unacceptable, as it implied a threat to use coercive power to elicit the newly independent states' compliance with Russia's whims.²²

According to Simonsen, Yeltsin's linkage game was far more multi-dimensional than a mere desire to control the Baltic republics. Russia's concerns for compatriots, he argues, can be explained "by a feeling of indirect national humiliation." Thus, as Yeltsin shifted to a more assertive policy towards the former Soviet Union, he increasingly referred to Russians in the former Soviet republics as an integral part of the Russian nation.²³

Apprehension over the Baltic states involvement with Western projects coloured Russia's statements regarding its capacity to safeguard the rights of 'compatriots' in these states. Yet it is precisely the Baltic states' accession process to the European Union and NATO that has been crucial in mediating the confrontation with Russia over minority and

²¹ Uldis Ozolins, "Between Russian and European Hegemony: Current Language Policy in the Baltic States," *Current Issues in Language and Society* 6:1 (1999), 10.

²² Simonsen, 771.

²³ *Ibid.*, 771-772.

language rights. The prospect of membership in the EU has provided Estonia and Latvia with incentives to make the language proficiency exam required for gaining citizenship less demanding. The Council of Europe has acknowledged the efforts of the Estonian Integration Foundation in promoting cooperation between Russian-language and Estonian-language schools.²⁴ In citizenship legislation, the language exam has been simplified; however, many non-citizens still felt that the exam was too difficult.²⁵ Another Council of Europe report noted that Latvia has simplified language provisions, and made inexpensive Latvian language courses available to non-citizens.²⁶ The same report noted, however, that the Russian-speaking population faces difficulties in various areas of life due to "laws, regulations and practice concerning the use of languages and education in languages other than Latvian."²⁷

The Kremlin, thus, has been and remains critical of the Baltic states' language policies. The Russian government remarked in 2002 that in Latvia, the strengthening of the state titular language does not fulfill guarantees for minorities to use their native language.²⁸ In February 2004, the Latvian parliament's approval of an amendment to state law mandating that 60 per cent of all classes in minority high schools be taught in Russian sparked protest among Latvia's Russian-speaking community. Educators in minority language schools claimed that with the new language law, Russian-speaking pupils face obstacles because they cannot fully comprehend studies when the instruction is conducted in another language.²⁹ Russia has expressed disapproval of the Latvian language reforms. At a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in May 2004, the

²⁴ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Third Report on Estonia, 24 June 2005, Section II.134.

http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1%2Decri/2%2Dcountry%2Dby%2Dcountry_approach/estonia/Estonia%20third%20report%20-%20cri06-1.pdf

²⁵ Ibid., Section I.10.

²⁶ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Second Report on Latvia, 14 December 2001, Section I.B.11-12.

http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1%2Decri/2%2Dcountry%2Dby%2Dcountry_approach/latvia/CB2%20Latvia.pdf

²⁷ Ibid., Section II.P.66.

²⁸ "K voprosu o statuse russkogo yazyka v Latvii," Departament informatzii i pechati, MIDRF, 25.3.2002. <http://www.ln.mid.ru/Ns-dksu.nsf/arh/432569F10031DCE643256B87003538AD?OpenDocument>

²⁹ See, for example, Elizabeth Celms, "Latvia: Quiet Revolution in the Classroom," *Transitions Online*, 30 October 2006, and Angus Roxburgh, "Latvian Lessons Irk Russians," *BBC News*, 29 March 2005.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4380437.stm>

Russian representative stated, "Educational reform, in its present guise, can best be described as a factor promoting social disintegration."³⁰

Although Russia's squabbles with Latvia and Estonia over language rights surfaced long before the prospect of the Baltic states' integration into the EU, these disputes also stem from a discomfort over the EU's expansion into Russia's historical sphere of influence.³¹ The Baltic states, once the most prosperous republics in the Soviet Union, has joined the European integration project and Russia no longer has leverage in relations with these countries. Russia uses the language issue to inform Baltic leaders that they cannot be indifferent to Moscow's concerns. Criticism over language rights serves merely as a symbolic reminder of Russia's legacy in the Baltic States. On a practical level, this criticism has translated into little policy change directly in Russia's favour.

Today, the language debate no longer carries as great a political momentum as it had a decade ago. For example, in the October 2006 Latvian parliamentary elections, the party representing ethnic Russians' issues abandoned its vociferous objection to the law on education that seeks to gradually increase the use of Latvian as the language of instruction in all state schools.³² In Estonia, the language debate has not been an issue of widespread public focus since the country's accession to the European Union. One possible explanation for the de-politicizing of this issue, according to Ozolins, is a greater general acceptance of the Baltic languages' legitimacy.³³ This claim, however, has not been supported by any comprehensive primary surveys. Another explanation is related to the fact that a significant number of Russian speakers in both Estonia and Latvia, although possessing electoral rights at the local level, do not yet have the right to vote at the national level. Regardless of the source for lack of political mobilization around the language issue, without direct appeals from the russophone community in the Baltic states, it would be difficult for Russian foreign policy to express any concrete objectives towards Estonia and Latvia in terms of improving the status of the Russian language. Using the language debate as a foreign policy tool to improve Russia's political leverage over the Baltic states is a far-fetched possibility.

³⁰ OSCE Document, Boris V. Timokhov, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, Statement at the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council on minority situation in Latvia and Estonia, 27 May 2004. http://www.osce.org/documents/pc/2004/05/3074_en.pdf

³¹ "Europe: Taking on the Bear," *The Economist*, 7 May 2005.

³² Celms, "Latvia: Quiet Revolution in the Classroom."

³³ Uldis Ozolins, "The Impact of European Accession upon Language Policy in the Baltic States," *Language Policy* 2 (2003), 230.

Ukraine

The situation of the Russian linguistic minority³⁴ in Ukraine differs vastly from that of the russophones in the Baltic States. Historically, Ukraine has been much more closely linked than the Baltic States to Russia. Russians have been well established in Ukraine long before the emergence of the Soviet Union. Russification policies during the Tsarist era also contributed to the presence of a sizable population of russified Ukrainians. During the Soviet era, language never posed a divisive issue, even with Russian as the Soviet state language. Ukrainians spoke Ukrainian in their homes, but switched to Russian in public life. Because Russian and Ukrainian are closely related languages, communication between both linguistic communities had never been particularly difficult.

After the collapse of the Soviet system, the switch from Russian to Ukrainian as the official state language nonetheless altered the linguistic dynamics of the country. Increasingly, Ukrainian came into wider public use through government policies. Schools began to use Ukrainian as the primary language of instruction. Radio and television stations began broadcasting programs in Ukrainian, and more publications were published in Ukrainian. However, the Russian language still has a visible presence in daily life. Russian speakers make up a sizeable proportion of the country's economic and political elite. In the country's eastern regions and in the Crimea, ethnic Russians make up a near majority of the population. According to Jan G. Janmaat,

Russian completely dominates public life in Donetsk and Odesa. Not a word of Ukrainian can be heard on the streets and in the shops and offices...Employees may produce documents in Ukrainian and teachers may give lectures in Ukrainian, but in conversations with colleagues and students they will immediately switch to Russian.³⁵

³⁴ According to the 2001 census data, the percentage of those who speak Ukrainian as a mother tongue accounts for 67.5% of Ukraine's population, while those who speak Russian as a mother tongue totals 29.6% of the population. See State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, All-Ukrainian Population Census 2001, Linguistic composition of the population, <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/language/>

³⁵ Jan G. Janmaat, "Language Politics in Education and the Response of the Russians in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers* 27:3 (1999), 479.

Moscow's policy statements strongly advocate the rights of the russophone minority in Ukraine to maintain the use of Russian in public life. Putin himself stated that a comprehensible policy in Ukraine should allow all national minorities who consider Russian as their native language to carry on life in their own language, to develop their language, to have the right to receive education in and work in their own language.³⁶ At times, this advocacy turns into harsh criticism. Moscow has accused Kiev of forcibly attempting to Ukrainianize the russophone population,³⁷ who make up nearly fifty percent of the country's population.³⁸ A Russian foreign ministry report in 2003 states that the Russian language in Ukraine continues to be excluded from political life, as well as from cultural, educational and informational space of the country.³⁹

The division between Ukrainian speakers and Russian speakers has, in the past, played out in the country's political scene, as was the case in the 2004 'Orange Revolution.' Language became a highly publicized issue, as each of the two front-runners for the presidency were associated with one of the country's two largest ethno-linguistic groups. Viktor Yanukovich was seen as a pro-Russia candidate determined to ensure that, with promises to make Russian an official state language, Ukraine's Russian speakers remained a dominant force in the country. Viktor Yushchenko was portrayed as an anti-Russian, Ukrainian nationalist candidate. Ukraine's russophones feared that he would seek to elevate Ukrainian language and culture against Russian dominance, and attempt to relegate Russian from the public sphere. Dominique Arel notes that in Central and Western Ukraine, where the proportion of people claiming Ukrainian as their preferred language is 75-80 per cent, support for Yushchenko was at the same range. In Eastern and Southern Ukraine, where 75-80 per cent of the population prefer Russian as their main language, support for Yanukovich was at approximately the same level.⁴⁰ However, Arel's characterization of this ethnic cleavage is over-simplified, as the correlation between linguistic identity and political affiliation does not correspond neatly

³⁶ "Stenogramma interv'yu Prezidenta Rossii V.V.Putina ukrainским sredstvami massovoi informatsii 6 fevralya 2001 goda, Moskva, Krem!," Departament informatsii i pechati, MIDRF, 16.2.2001.

<http://www.in.mid.ru/Ns-rsng.nsf/arh/432569D800221466432569F500497E3F?OpenDocument>

³⁷ This group refers to ethnic Russians as well as russified Ukrainians.

³⁸ Smolansky, 127.

³⁹ "Iz doklada Ministerstva inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii "Russkii yazyk v mire", Moskva, 2003 god," MIDRF. <http://www.mid.ru/Ns-rsng.nsf/arh/432569D800221466C3256E05004D2D62?OpenDocument>

⁴⁰ Dominique Arel, "The 'Orange Revolution': Analysis and Implications of the 2004 Presidential Election in Ukraine," Paper for the third annual Stasiuk-Cambridge Lecture on Contemporary Ukraine, Cambridge University 25 February 2005. http://www.ukrainiancambridge.org/Images/Arel_Cambridge_english.pdf

in all regions to his generalization. Nonetheless, his observation does suggest that language plays a significant role in the country's public discourse. The Ukrainian-Russian language debate is part of a larger, overarching question on Ukraine's identity. This identity question, in turn, touches upon the sensitive history of relations between Russia and Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's endorsement of Yanukovich's candidacy thus appeared to Ukrainians as a deliberate attempt to meddle in Ukrainian affairs, and pit the russophone minority against the Ukrainian-speakers. After Yanukovich's defeat, Russia has, on occasion, continued its criticism of Ukrainian language policies. What is more puzzling, however, are Russia's statements on language after the corrosion of the 'Orange coalition' led to Yanukovich's appointment as prime minister. In recent statements, the Russian Foreign Ministry suggested that the Russian language was under severe pressure in the western regions, especially in Ivano-Frankivsk. This Russian Foreign Ministry press release on 27 September 2006 claimed,

According to directions issued by the local Ukrainian authorities, it is now forbidden to speak in Russian anywhere on the territory of educational institutions, mass events are not allowed to be held in Russian and it is even forbidden to post announcements in Russian in public places. Observation of booksellers and those distributing periodicals in Russian has been implemented. The Committee of Public Language Control will look for adherence to these rules; the Committee has been invested with the practical functions of a 'language inquisition.'⁴¹

Such a statement could be interpreted as a strong message to Yanukovich not to abandon the priorities of his Russian-speaking electorate as a compromise for being in a position of power. It appears, then, that Russian foreign policy, lacking direct channels for influencing political outcomes in Ukraine, is seeking to use language as a tool to

⁴¹ "Kommentarii Departamenta informatzii i pechati MID Rossii v svyazi s voprosom RIA «Novosti» otноситel'no prodolzhayuweisia diskriminatzii russkogo yazyka na Ukraine," Departament informatzii i pechati, MIDRF, 27.9.2006.
http://www.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/04229E7BB01F013FC32571F6003F6DC0?OpenDocument

make its presence as a regional power known in Ukraine. Russian foreign policy concerns for the language debate indirectly represent a tendency for Russia to compete with the various internal and external forces for influence in Ukraine.

Language in Ukraine, however, is only a small dimension of Ukrainian politics. Tensions between Ukraine and Russia stem far beyond the language question. Squabbles between the two countries touch upon much more concrete security and economic issues, such as the fate of Russia's Black Sea fleet, the status of Crimea, and distribution of energy sources. Ukraine, on the other hand, as part of the CIS, is vital for Russian foreign policy interests. With Yushchenko's victory in the Orange Revolution, Russia is weary of a west-ward shift in Ukraine's foreign policy orientation. Playing the role of 'patron' of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine is a way for Russia to indicate to Ukrainian leaders that the latter should not ignore Moscow's interests.

In the ensuing aftermath of the Orange Revolution, the language debate has become less prominent due to the erosion of the 'Orange' coalition itself, as well as the emergence of more serious domestic and foreign policy dilemmas, such as economic reform and battling corruption. Since taking control of the presidency, Yushchenko has not actively considered a program designed to strengthen the use of Ukrainian in public and political life, nor has Yanukovich and his supporters vocally expressed demands for Russian to be established as an official state language. Without the internal impetus in Ukraine to bring the language question to the forefront, it will be difficult for the Russian Federation to use the language debate as a foreign policy tool in the future.

Moldova

The Republic of Moldova represents yet another difference case where the Russian Federation has a stake in the russophone population. Unlike both the Baltic States and Ukraine, Moldova's case is complicated by the fact that there are two 'patron' states claiming interest in the country's language policies. Russia already claims interest for russophones living in Moldova, which account for 16 per cent of the country's population.⁴² Since the titular language of Moldova - Moldovan - is essentially identical to the Romanian language, Romania also has stakes to claim in the language debate.

⁴² Statistica Moldovei (National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova), *Informatsionnaya zapiska, "Itogi perepisi naseleniya 2004 goda. Social'no-demograficheskie kharakteristiki,"* 4.4.2006. This figure, drawn based on information from the 2004 census, takes into account the number of non-ethnic

Russia's initial interest in Moldova reflects the complicated situation in this state. The Transdnistria conflict between Moldovans and secessionist Russians in the region in the early 1990s added a military dimension to the language debate. In the ensuing aftermath of the conflict in spring 1992, Russia sent the 10,000 troops-strong Fourteenth Army as a 'peacekeeping' force in the break-away region, on the grounds that Russia had a need to defend ethnic Russians beyond its own borders.⁴³ Russian policy was initially motivated by the need to defend the interests of the Russian minority, as well as the desire to prevent Moldova's integration with Romania.⁴⁴ As the latter situation became less feasible due to Romania's preoccupation with its own transition problems, Russia's focus in Moldova shifted toward the rights of the russophones.

Moldova's language policies are further complicated by a situation in which one language, due to the country's historical circumstances, is universally known, but is not the native language of the country's substantial majority. Although Moldovan had been established as the state's official language after independence, Russian remains the main language of contact between Romanian speakers and those who do not have command of the state language. Since the majority of the population speaks Moldovan as a mother tongue, the promotion of this language is a reasonable policy aim. However, this policy was set in a country where almost the entire population could communicate in Russian. Thus, the practical effect of promoting Moldovan meant excluding Russians from public life, since the minority of the population who speak Russian as a mother tongue cannot function in the titular language.⁴⁵

In post-Soviet Moldova, language laws complicated the situation of Russian speakers who remained in the state. These laws were based on a 1989 decree by the Moldavian S.S.R. marking Moldovan as the official language, while recognizing Russian as a language for inter-nationality communication within the Soviet Union. Since this law also declared that citizens had the right to use their own language in public life, workers

Russians who claim Russian as their mother tongue. According to this summary, of the 5.9% of the ethnic Russian population, 97.2% claim Russian as their native language. Ethnic Ukrainians, accounting for 8.4% of the population, are the second largest source of Russian speakers, with 31.8% of this group listing Russian as their first language.

⁴³ Nieves Perez-Solarzano Borragan, "Moldova, a Hot Spot on the CIS Map?" in Williams and Sfikas, eds., 219.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ John Quigley, "Towards International Norms on Linguistic Rights: The Russian-Romanian Controversy in Moldova," *Connecticut Journal of International Law* 10 (Fall 1994), 97-98.

in the public sector must know both Moldovan and Russian.⁴⁶ Russian speakers have claimed that because they were unable to communicate in Moldovan, they were essentially excluded from public service positions they previously held during the Soviet era. This factor has elicited from Russia criticisms of discrimination.

According to the Russian government, Moldovan laws regarding language are full of ambiguities that could be a detriment to Russian language use. In spite of Russian's 'special status,' educational instruction is carried out in the state language (Moldovan). This, according to the Russian government, is contradictory to Moldovan law specifying that national minorities have the right to receive education in their mother tongue. The Russian foreign ministry is concerned that Russian language schools in Russian standards are non-existent in Moldova. It alleges that the Moldovan government is replacing promises of giving Russian an official status with maintaining the dominance of the state language in all spheres of public life.⁴⁷

Within recent years, however, the government in Moldova has sought to increase the use of Russian. For example, in July 2001 the Communist-dominated parliament adopted legislation granting Russian a special status that entitles Russian-speakers education in their native language at all levels. In December of the same year, the Ministry of Education declared that Russian language would become mandatory in all schools beginning with the second grade. This decision was based on the reasoning that since Russian remains the basic means of interethnic dialogue for the former Soviet territories, the use of Russian should be an objective reality to be considered.⁴⁸ Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin has stressed that Moldova does not follow anti-Russian policies, and that the government has in no way restricted the rights of Russian-speakers in the country.⁴⁹

Russian language status is only one among several issues plaguing relations between Russia and Moldova. The Transdnestrrian 'conflict' placed the Russian and Moldovan governments at odds with each other. While Russia has not formally recognized the break-away region's independence, Russia's cooperation with

⁴⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁷ "O polozhenii russkogo yazyka v Respublike Moldova," Departament informatzii i pechati, MIDRF, 30.5.2006. <http://www.ln.mid.ru/Ns-rsng.nsf/arh/E840C66F326FC6CDC3256E53002458B3?OpenDocument>

⁴⁸ "Rumynom byt' ne zapretish," *IA Regnum*, 28.11.2006.

⁴⁹ "Vladimir Voronin ne schitaet politiku Moldavii antirossiiskoi," *Agentstvo natziona'lnykh novostei*, 21.12.2005.

Transdnistria's separatist leader, Igor Smirnov, and approval for a vote in the region on independence has angered Moldovan officials.⁵⁰ Moldova's economic dependence on Russia puts it in a vulnerable position. The Moldovan politicians' implicit demands for preferential treatment from Moscow as a CIS country have not been met with much enthusiasm from Russian officials.⁵¹ In this respect, one might assume that Russian foreign policy could use the language issue as a stick-and-carrot method for regulating relations with Moldova. Indeed, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin's July 2006 six-point plan for improving relations with Russia emphasized strengthening the position of the Russian language and protecting the rights of Russians living in Moldova on both sides of the Dniestre.⁵² However, promises for improvements in guarantees for Russian language rights in Moldova as a trade-off for improvements in other aspects of Russian-Moldovan relations have not had dramatic effects. Fundamental disagreements between the two states on political, economic and military issues remain unresolved. In terms of the two countries' foreign policy priorities, the language issue on its own pales in comparison. Thus, the language debate cannot be viewed as a revanchist Russian foreign policy tactic. As in the Baltic states and Ukraine, Russia's concern over language rights in Moldova is merely an outcome of Russia's efforts to rediscover the Russian nation and to re-establish Russia's interests in the region.

Conclusion

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's original concerns for the well being of Russians in the former Soviet republics stemmed from the initial possibility that Russian lives, or at least their way of life in dominant positions, could be at risk. These concerns surfaced as ethnic conflicts in various parts of the post-Soviet space adversely affected the lives of Russians in these territories. Therefore, Moscow's early foreign policy emphasized safeguarding its old sphere of influence in the new successor states, in particular with regards to the Russian-speaking minorities.⁵³ In the earlier years of the

⁵⁰ International Crisis Group, "Moldova's Uncertain Future," Europe Report No. 175 (17 August 2006), 3.

⁵¹ "Russia-Moldova: Kremlin Wants Deeds, not Words," *RIA Novosti*, 28.8.2006.

<http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20060828/53238859.html>

⁵² "Prezident Moldavii khochet pomirit' cya," *Kommersant'*, 7.8.2006.

⁵³ Borragan, 220.

Soviet system's collapse, Russia's concerns for Russian minorities in the newly independent states took on a political-military dimension.

As the western part of the post-Soviet territories stabilized in the 1990s, the urgency for Moscow's direct intervention in the fate of the Russian-speaking minorities gradually subsided. The rationale for Russia's keen interest of the russophones in the post-Soviet space became linked to Russia's desire to maintain its role as an influential leader in the region. For western observers, the Russian government's criticism of the western post-Soviet republics' language policies has raised important foreign policy concerns. Russia, by claiming interest over the linguistic rights of its 'compatriots' outside the state, has heightened suspicions that Russia seeks to re-establish an imperial authority in the former Soviet territories.

Since Putin's terms in office, however, much of the Russian Federation's concrete activities relating to the development of the Russian language have to do with the cultural front. This includes, for example, limited funding for establishing Russian language resources in foreign libraries, and strengthening Russian collections in foreign museums.⁵⁴ With small exceptions, the language issue has not been at the forefront of any major diplomatic disagreements between Russia and its neighbours.

While Russian officials are prone to dramatic outbursts about the deplorable situation of Russian language rights in the former Soviet republics, these statements do not represent a genuine intent towards a revanchist and neo-imperialist foreign policy direction. On the surface, these foreign policy statements make Russia appear as a recalcitrant state determined to impose its will on weaker neighbours. Beneath this rhetoric, however, Russia's statements on language rights in the former Soviet republics are related to attempts to cope with its changing status in the international system.

Irina Kobrinskaya argues that moves by the Kremlin to assert its international influence in some foreign policy areas can be characterized by Putin's new concept of a 'pro-Russian' foreign policy. This is part of Russia's effort to recover as a national sovereign state, as it attempts to seek external affirmation of its position as a center of power in the post-Soviet space.⁵⁵ Indeed, Russia envisions itself as part of an influential body in world politics, especially as the clear leader of the CIS. As Ivanov states, "Russia was ...committed to pursuing policies that would deepen integration among members of

⁵⁴ "Compatriots in Neighboring and Distant Countries," 172-173.

⁵⁵ Kobrinskaya, 87.

the CIS... It was only natural that the leadership and organizational role for this effort after the Soviet collapse fell to Russia.”⁵⁶ As Russia faces more Western pressure in trying to distance the post-Soviet states from Russia and involved them into the EU and NATO projects,⁵⁷ relations with the CIS member countries have become more vital. Russia thus feels the necessity to secure its interests in all spheres. Ivanov adds, “Russia will not tolerate attempts by third party states to act within the CIS in a way that undermines Russian interests, excludes Russia from participating, or in any way weakens Russia’s position.”⁵⁸

For the Kremlin to pursue an effective foreign policy strategy in neighbouring countries, however, it has to be secured against neo-imperial accusations from the West.⁵⁹ This means that Russian foreign policy needs to accept the changing reality that Russian speakers in the western post-Soviet space may eventually adapt to their new socio-linguistic environment, with or without the ‘interference’ of the Russian federation. While Russia will continue to claim legitimate interest in the status of Russian-speakers in the ‘Near Abroad,’ securing language rights for russophones as a prerequisite for improving relations in other areas, such as energy and military security, will not yield positive results. As long as the post-Soviet successor states make satisfactory progress for ensuring the rights of linguistic minorities as set out by European standards, Russia will not have any real influence over the language issue.

In light of the rapid political changes in the post-Soviet space, Russia's interest in the language status of Russians should not be seen as part of a re-imperialization project, nor as a political tool to gain leverage in the region. Given the West's increasing interest in the post-Soviet region, Russian foreign policy seeks to maintain its voice in a region, which Russia has traditionally considered as 'its own.'⁶⁰ Russia's concerns for Russian language rights, as part of an effort to secure broader minority rights in the 'Near Abroad' can thus be interpreted as an attempt to re-construct a Russian political identity in the evolving post-Soviet environment.

⁵⁶ Ivanov, 84.

⁵⁷ Kobrinskaya, 88.

⁵⁸ Ivanov, 87.

⁵⁹ Kobrinskaya, 82.

⁶⁰ Konstantin Kosachev, “From the Logic of Near Abroad to the Community of Interests,” *International Affairs*, 51:3 (2005), 86.

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