

## LANGUAGES IN RUSSIA

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Russia is home to diverse cultures, which are manifested in the high number of different languages used all over the country. Russian is the official language. It is an Indo-European, East Slavic along with Ukrainian and Belarussian, and has its own alphabet: Cyrillic. More than 120 languages are spoken in Russia. Almost everyone speaks Russian. Many of the ethnic groups in the country speak their own language, with Russian being either their first or second language. There are other 35 languages which are used as official languages in different regions of Russia, the most popular of which is Tatar (Tartar), spoken by more than 3% of the country's population. Other minority languages include Ukrainian, Chuvash, Bashir, Mordvin, Circassian and Chechen. Although few of these populations make up even 1% of the Russian population, these languages are prominent in key regional areas.

Languages: Russian (official) 96.3 percent, Dolgong 5.3 percent, German 1.5 percent, Chechen 1 percent, Tatar 3 percent, other 10.3 percent. The total adds up to more than 100 percent because some respondents gave more than one answer on the census (2010 est.). [Source: CIA World Factbook =]

The Russian language has dominated cultural and official life throughout the history of the nation, regardless of the presence of other ethnic groups. Linguistic groups in Russia run the gamut from Slavic (spoken by more than three-quarters of the population) to Turkic, Caucasian, Finno-Ugric, Eskimo, Yiddish, and Iranian. Russification campaigns during both the tsarist and communist eras suppressed the languages and cultures of all minority nationalities. Although the Soviet-era constitutions affirmed the equality of all languages with Russian for all purposes, in fact language was a powerful tool of Soviet nationality policy. The governments of both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation have used the Russian language as a means of promoting unity among the country's nationalities, as well as to provide access to literary and scientific materials not available in minority languages. According to the Brezhnev regime, all Soviet peoples "voluntarily" adopted Russian for use in international communication and to promote the unity of the Soviet Union. [Source: Library of Congress, July 1996 ]

Although Russian is the lingua franca of the Russian Federation, Article 26 of the 1993 constitution stipulates that "each person has the right to use his native language and to the free choice of language of communication, education, instruction, and creativity." Article 68 affirms the right of all peoples in the Russian Federation "to retain their mother tongue and to create conditions for its study and development." Although such constitutional provisions often prove meaningless, the non-Slavic tongues of Russia have retained their vitality, and they even have grown more prevalent in some regions. This trend is especially visible as autonomy of language becomes an important symbol of the struggle to preserve distinct ethnic identities. In the 1990s, many non-Russian ethnic groups have issued laws or decrees giving their native languages equal status with Russian in their respective regions of the Russian Federation. In the mid-1990s, some 80 percent of the non-Slavic

nationalities--or 12 percent of the population of the Russian Federation--did not speak Russian as their first language.



Fig.1 Map of languages spoken in Russia

The wide variety of languages spoken in Russia is definitely connected with its area, since Russia is the biggest country in the world. Huge area, which was gained throughout hundreds of years created a sort of language mix in this country. It is also important to state that amongst many languages spoken in Russia, there are also those which are considered to be endangered including Evenki language spoken in Siberia or Juhuri language spoken in Caucasus. Some of the more popular languages spoken in Russia are Finnish, Romani and Saami.

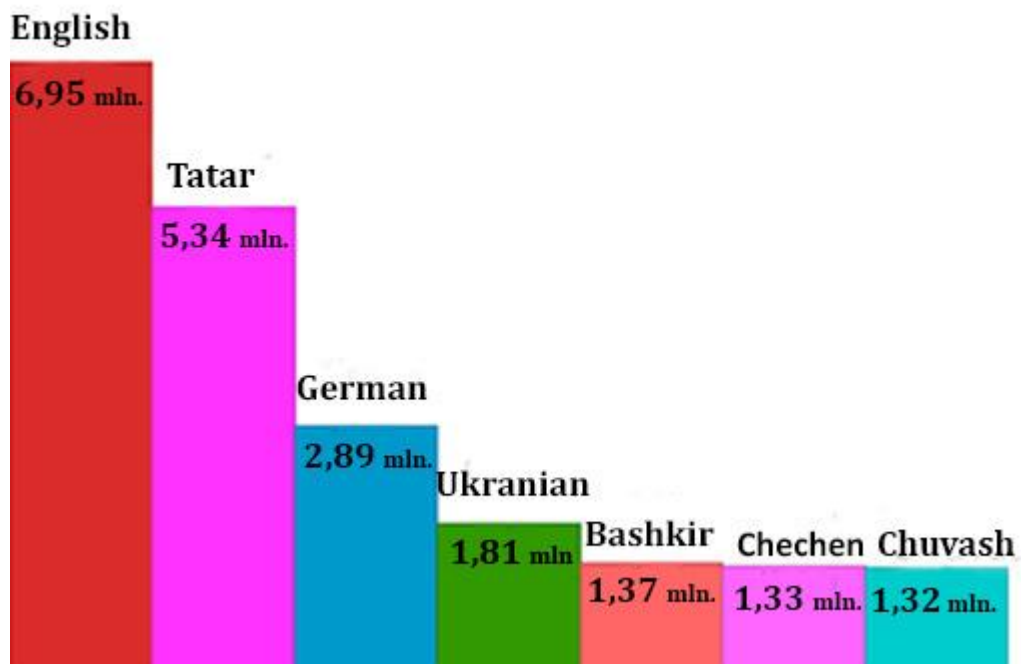


Fig.2 Languages spoken in Russia besides Russian.

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