

Soviet Language Policy vis-à-vis Minority Languages: The Road to Disintegration

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ABSTRACT

The present linguistic situation in Russia, however much it may have been affected by political and economic considerations, is overwhelmingly the consequence of what people have made of their geographical conditions, their history and their long-standing language and ethnic contacts over many centuries. The present linguistic complexity of Russia is a part of the heritage of a long history as well as the consequence of policies pursued during the seventy years by the erstwhile Soviet State. Here we examine how the Soviet language policies towards the minority and regional languages contributed towards the eventual disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Keywords: Language policy, minority languages, soviet disintegration

One of the abiding legacies of the Soviet system was to view language and culture of the people as an appendage to politics of the leadership of a given period. So much so, that linguistics became entwined with Soviet nationalities and their problems. New republics, regions, etc., were created on Stalin's whim. Not only that such a policy introduced an element of instability in Soviet system, but it also led to a simmering social discontent and political unrest.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union shows constant territorial growth, and the problems accompanying relationships between peoples with quite different cultures and languages have existed for almost a thousand years. The expansionist policies of the Tsars not only created the framework within which any subsequent "nationalities" policy had to operate, but to a large extent, and perhaps inevitably, determined some of the directions, which such policies followed. As a result, the Russian Empire became an immense multilingual state, consisting of about 180