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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Language to Become Compulsory in Syrian Schools

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The Syrian government plans to introduce mandatory Russian-language classes in its schools, Itar-Tass reported Thursday.

The Syrian government made the decision following Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin's visit last Saturday to the war-torn republic. Rogozin met with Syrian President Bashar Assad and expressed Moscow's confidence in "the full legitimacy" of the upcoming presidential vote there.

Former Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin, who announced the news at the State Duma Thursday, contrasted Russia-Syria relations with the diplomatic turmoil that has arisen from the Ukraine crisis. "We are being pressured in Ukraine, but look at what is happening in Syria," Stepashin said.

According to Stepashin, Syria has always been "our [Russia's] real outpost in the Middle East."

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