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Russian Language on the Decline Thanks to English, Says Official

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Dmitry Feoktistov / TASS

The number of Russian speakers has decreased by about 50 million since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the chairman of the State Duma Committee for Education and Science was cited as saying by the Interfax news agency on Monday.

Vyacheslav Nikonov called for an expansion of the Eurasian Union and an increase in educational programs abroad to counter the decline from a high of 350 million to 300 million Russian speakers today.

The decrease is primarily due to the growing linguistic hegemony of English and changes in state education policies in the former Soviet republics, Nikonov said.

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“In the Soviet Union everyone spoke Russian, but that older generation, which was entirely Russian-speaking, has disappeared in the past 25 years,” Nikonov said, adding that younger generations have grown up in an environment where Russian is no longer obligatory in schools.

“Russian language [retains its position] in places where it’s a part of the educational system, where it’s taught in schools,” Nikonov said.

"We need to expand the boundaries of our Eurasian Union," he said. "For example, there are countries where there is a huge demand for the Russian language: Tajikistan, Moldova, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan.”

Last week, Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko said Russian would remain an official state language. “Let us have two native languages – Russian and Belarussian,” Lukashenko said.

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