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Armenian Minister Quells Fears of Russian Language Expansion

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Following an uproar over the Culture Ministry's decision to bolster Russian language programs in Armenian schools, Armenia's Education Minister said that Russian will remain a foreign language in Armenia.

"The only official language in Armenia is and will remain the Armenian language, since we are an independent, sovereign state," Levon Mkrtchyan told the state-run TASS news agency on Monday. "This is an axiomatic truth, all other languages are foreign."

Mkrtchyan's comments came in the wake of an ongoing controversy after the Armenian Culture Ministry published its plan on Sept. 11 to adopt a new policy that would improve Russian-language education in Armenian schools.

The Ministry's announcement was reportedly met with heavy criticism over fears the policy would threaten the Armenian language's status.

In an interview with RFE/RL's Armenian service, Armenian activist David Sanasaryan said that Russia has always been clear in its intentions to spread Russian throughout post-Soviet countries.

Armenian officials, the activists said, "speak about the indispensability of the Armenian language, but [their actions] start to subvert, to weaken the positions of the Armenian language."

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of Russian speakers has decreased by about 50 million, the chairman of Russia's State Duma Committee for Education and Science Vyacheslav Nikonov was cited as saying by the Interfax news agency on Aug. 28.

Related article: Russian Language on the Decline Thanks to English, Says Official

To counter the decline, Nikonov called for an expansion of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and an increase in educational programs abroad. Armenia is one of five countries belonging to the EEU.

Despite the Russian language's widespread use in Armenia, Russian "has not had any official status so far," Mkrtchyan added.

The minister stressed the importance of the measure by highlighting that Russian is the most commonly-spoken language in Armenia, is the language of the EEU, and the language of Armenia's scientific institutions.

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