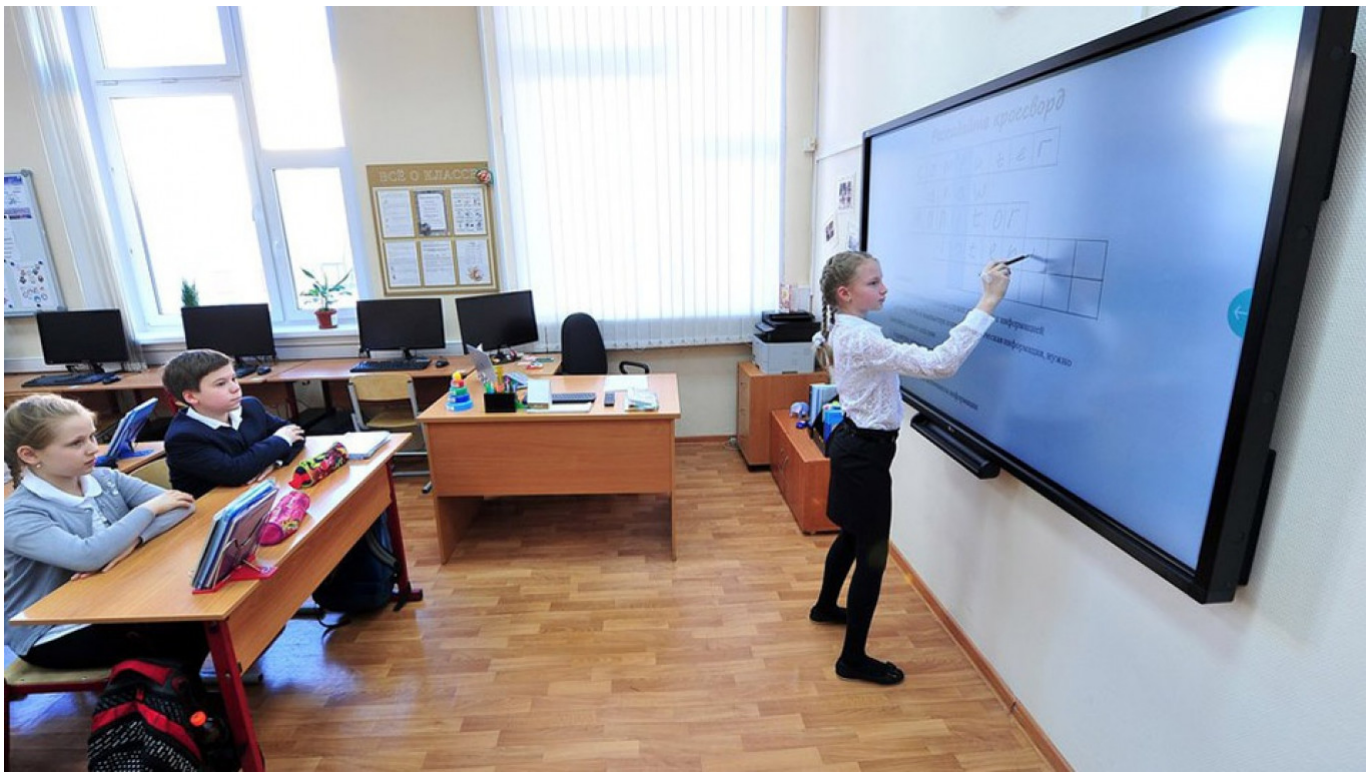
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Putin Establishes Foundation to Preserve Russia's Native Languages

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Sergei Kiselyov / Moskva News Agency

President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree that establishes a foundation to help preserve Russia's native languages, the Kremlin announced on Friday.

The measure comes in the wake of worries in Russia's republics that their native languages are under threat. In June, the State Duma signed a bill into law that restricts the teaching of regional languages in school. While Russian is the country's only national language, 35 languages are recognized officially and 111 are spoken throughout Russia, according to the Unrepresented Nations and People Organization (UNPO).

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Putin's decree calls for the new foundation "to create conditions for the preservation and study of the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, which are part of

Russia's national treasure and historical and cultural heritage."

The organization will be located in Moscow and will be run by the Education Ministry and the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs. It will be financed from the federal budget as well as through donations, according to the decree.

"It is very important [to preserve native languages] because every year in the world a large number of languages and dialects disappear," Putin was cited as saying by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency at an educational forum earlier this year.

Meanwhile, Vyacheslav Nikonov, the chairman of the State Duma Committee for Education and Science, worried last year about the decline of Russian speakers.

"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. He added that younger generations have grown up in an environment where Russian is no longer obligatory in schools.

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