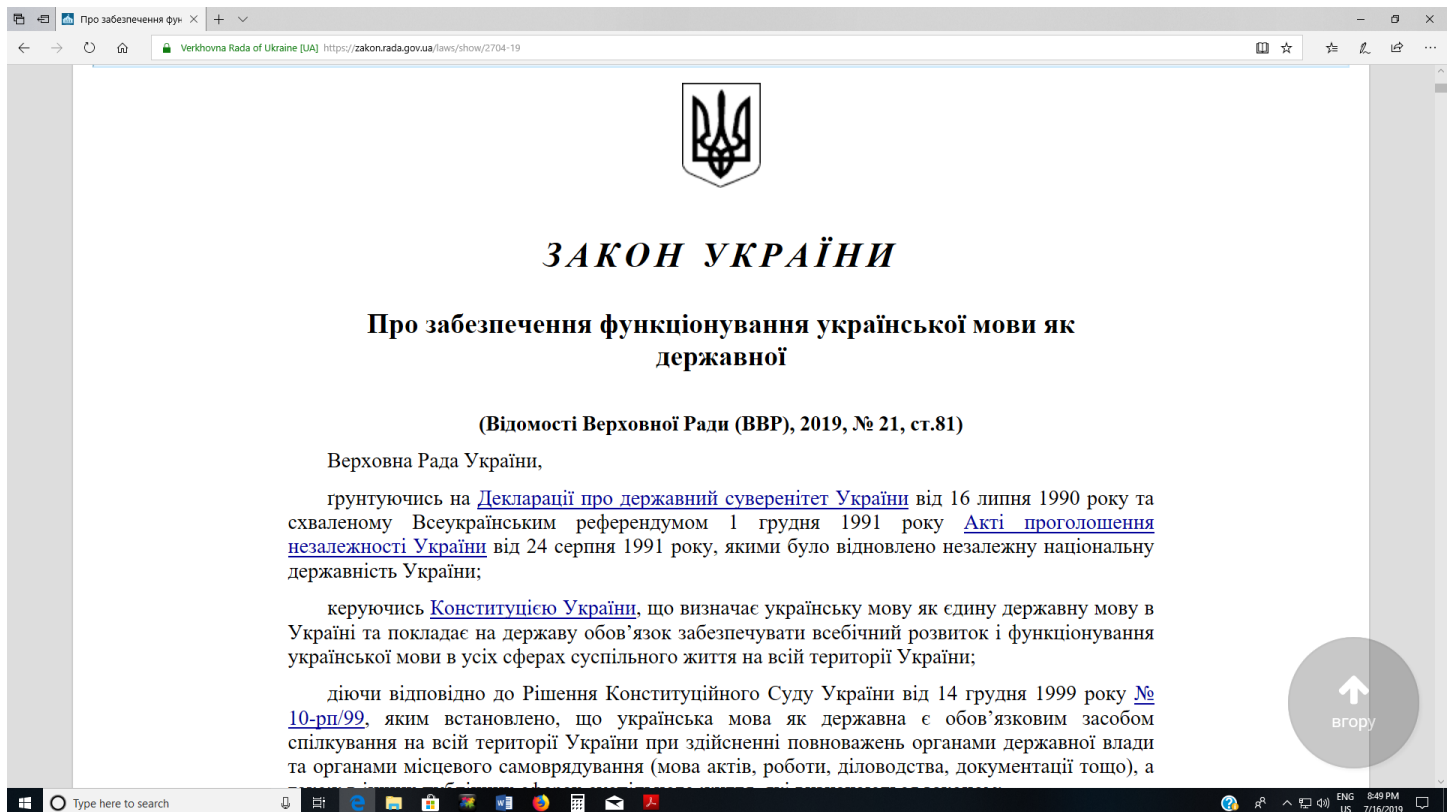# After Ukraine's New Language Law, It Is High Time for Ukrainian Russian

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On 16 July 2019, Ukraine's new language law (passed by the Ukrainian Parliament on 24 April 2019) came into power (https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2704-19). It is a momentous event. For better or worse, Ukraine is located in Central Europe, where at present the ethnolinguistic nation-state is the sole form of legitimate statehood. A language's speakers are believed to constitute a nation. In turn, in the nation's polity, this tongue is commonly declared the sole national and official (state) language. Hence, Bulgarian fulfills this role of exclusive national and official language in Bulgaria, Estonian in Estonia, Hungarian in Hungary, Montenegrin in Montenegro, or Slovak in Slovakia. In line with the bilateral treaties (contracted in the framework of the French Prime Minister, Édouard Balladur's, 1993 Pact on Stability in Europe) and the Council of Europe's Charter on Regional or Minority Languages (1992), the public use of other languages (typically) indigenous to a given nation-state's territory is guaranteed across Europe.

The Law of Ukraine: On Ensuring the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as a State language (Source: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2704-19)

In postcommunist Central Europe, Belarus is the sole polity, which decided (in 1995) to grant equal official status to the non-national language of Russian, alongside the national language of Belarusian. As a result, during the last quarter of a century, the public employment of the national language has been rapidly limited to a tenth of the

country's population and to a tenth of official documents and publications produced in Belarus.

This development, from the perspective of Central Europe's ethnolinguistic nationalism seems to be delegitimizing Belarus as a nation-state. On the other hand, in the early 2010s, under the name of *Russkii Mi*r ('Russian World'), the Kremlin adopted the ideology of ethnolinguistic nationalism for conquering (as in the case of Crimea or eastern Ukraine) or influencing (as in the case of the Baltic republics, Belarus, Israel, or Kazakhstan) areas and countries populated by Russophone populations.

However, unlike Moscow's protestations to this end, Russian is *not* any minority, but a world language, similar in this regard to English, German, or Spanish. Spanish-speakers in Colombia or Mexico are *not* Spaniards. Similarly, English-speakers in Australia or the United States are *not* English, and German-speakers in Austria or Switzerland are *not* Germans.

Hence, Russian-speakers in Ukraine or Israel are *not* Russians, but Ukrainians and Israelis, respectively. In accordance with the offensive (geopolitical) function of the *Russkii Mir* ideology, Moscow claims the sole right to control the Russian language across the entire world. Americans or Canadians would just laugh out loud if London proposed that only Britain should have the right to control the English language. In the case of world languages, each state where such a tongue is in official (or de facto) use controls and employs it in agreement with this state's interests and needs. As a result, American English is employed in the United States, Australian English in Australia, or British English in Britain. The norm is the emergence and acceptance of country-specific varieties of global languages.

Apart from adopting the aforementioned new language law, now Kyiv must take another logical step in order to safeguard the ideological and geopolitical security of Ukraine in the context of Central Europe's ethnolinguistic nation-states, alongside resurgent Russia's employment of ethnolinguistic nationalism for justifying and (re)building an empire. The nature of Russian as a global language, consisting of state-specific varieties, must be clearly recognized. Ukraine, under the relentless Russian onslaught since 2014, is best prepared to take this step, and lead the way to the recognition and acceptance of country-specific varieties of the Russian language in post-Soviet nation-states, alongside Israel and Mongolia.

Ukraine's variety of this language is Ukrainian Russian (Українська російська мова *Ukrains'ka rosiis'ka mova*). Kyiv must take full control of *its* Ukrainian Russian, as widely proposed in the wake of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity (https://inosmi.ru/social/20161012/238007992.html), though somehow this practical and geopolitical necessity was sidelined and half-forgotten during the recent years. A State Institute of Ukrainian Russian needs to be established as a matter of urgency. The institute's first task should be the compilation of a corpus of Ukrainian Russian, that is, of Russian words, expressions and grammatical constructions used in speech and writing on the territory of today's Ukraine during the last two centuries. Such a corpus would constitute the basis for preparing a normative grammar and dictionary of Ukrainian

Russian, with an emphasis, both, on usages and terms specific to Ukraine and on these that reflect the country's cultural, political and social specificities.

Petition on the creation of the Ukrainian standard of the Russian language lodged in 2015 with the Office of the President of Ukraine (Source: https://petition.president.gov.ua/petition/15853)

In turn, only these normative principles of correctness for the use of Ukrainian Russian (as worked out by the aforementioned State Institute of Ukrainian Russian) should be employed in school, state offices, or any Russian-language publications or mass media programs produced in Ukraine. In the United States they write 'theater' or 'catalog,' while in Britain – 'theatre' and 'catalogue.' No one protests, or let alone, goes to war on this account.

Killing or annexing land over the puff of hot air, which language is, is wrong and not worth it. The current price tag of the antiquated Soviet tank T-72 tank is 45,000 euros, which would be more than sufficient for compiling the aforementioned corpus, grammar and dictionary of Ukrainian Russian. On the other hand, the latest variant of the US Abrams tank is 7.7 million euros, which would ensure the wide-ranging functioning of the State Institute of Ukrainian Russian for a decade or so (http://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/05/08/estonian-russian-if-or-when/).

Seizing the strategic (geopolitical) advantage of Ukrainian Russian is cheap and cost-effective, given that it would overnight delegitimize the Kremlin's spurious claim that Russia is the 'proper' nation-state of all the globe's Russian-speakers. So far Russia's war on Ukraine has cost over 13,000 people their lives and displaced almost 2 million from their homes

(https://ispan.waw.pl/journals/index.php/sn/article/view/sn.1637/4385; https://www.unian.info/war/10416549-donbas-war-death-toll-rises-up-to-nearly-13-000-un.html). Obviously, Ukrainian Russian will not stop the war, but shall fatally undermine the logic of the Russkii Mir ideology as the leading 'justification' for Russia's neoimperial annexations and interventions.

When Kyiv has taken the vital step of recognizing Ukrainian Russian, then the Council of European and other international organizations will at long last see Russian for what it is, namely, a global language (like English), consisting of country-specific varieties. The fact that the nation of Canadians speak English (alongside French, Inuktitut and other languages) does not give Britain any right to attack Canada or annex this country's lands.

By the same measure, the fact that some Ukrainians speak Russian could not and should not be seen as valid argument for Russian annexations and war against Ukraine. Now, after the coming into power of the new language law, the Ukrainian government and parliament must not stop halfway. They ought to claim Ukrainian Russian as one of Ukraine's languages, and take it out from Russia's growing offensive arsenal of hybrid warfare. It would be only for a better and peaceful future of Ukraine, Europe, the world and Russia itself.

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