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RUSSIAN SOVIET FEDERATIVE SOCIALIST REPUBLIC  
LAW ON THE LANGUAGES OF THE PEOPLES OF THE RUSSIAN  
FEDERATION

(as amended by the Federal law, July 24 1998, # 126-Φ3)

**Introduction**

The languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation are the national wealth of the Russian State.

The languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation are under the protection of the State.

The State promotes the development of the national languages, bilingualism and multilingualism on the whole territory of the Russian Federation.

This Law is aimed at creation of the conditions for preservation and enjoying equal rights and original development of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation and is called to become a basis for the establishment of the system of the legal regulation of the activities of legal and physical persons and for elaboration of normative legal acts with the purpose of implementation of the provisions of this law.

In the Russian Federation are intolerable propaganda of enmity and contempt to any language, creation of obstacles, restrictions and privileges in the language use contrary to constitutionally established principles of ethnic policies, other violations of the legislation of the Russian Federation on the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

**Chapter I. General provisions**

Article 1. The legislation of the Russian Federation about the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation

1. The legislation of the Russian Federation on the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation is based on the Constitution of the Russian Federation, generally recognized principles and norms of international law and international treaties of the Russian Federation and consists of this Law, federal laws and other normative legal acts of the Russian Federation, as well as of laws and other normative legal acts of the subjects of the Russian Federation.

2. This Law covers the spheres of the language communication, which are the subject to legal regulation, and does not establish the juridical norms for using the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation in inter-personal unofficial relations, as well as in the activities of non-governmental and religious associations and organizations.

Article 2. The state guarantees of equality of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation

1. The equality of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation is the aggregate of the peoples' and person's rights to preservation and comprehensive development of the native language, freedom of choice and use of the language of communication.
2. The Russian Federation guarantees to all its peoples regardless of their numbers equal rights to preservation and comprehensive development of the native language, freedom of choice and use of the language of communication.
3. The Russian Federation guarantees to everybody the right to use the native language, free choice of the language of communication, upbringing, education and creative activity regardless of his origin, social and property position, race or ethnicity, sex, education, attitude towards religion, and place of residence.
4. The equality of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation is protected by law. No one has the right to establish restrictions or privileges in the use of one or another language, except for cases envisaged by the legislation of the Russian Federation. The provisions of this Law are binding for the citizens of the Russian Federation, as well for foreigners and stateless persons within the territory of the Russian Federation.

#### Article 3. The juridical position of the languages

1. The state language of the Russian Federation on all its territory is Russian language.
2. The republics have the right to establish their own state languages according to the Constitution of the Russian Federation.
3. In accordance with this Law the subjects of the Russian Federation have the right to adopt laws and other normative legal acts about the protection of the citizens' rights to free choice of the language of communication, upbringing, education and creative activity.
4. In the areas of compact residence of the population not having its national-state and national-territorial formations or residing beyond their borders, the language of the population of this territory can be used in the official spheres of communication along with the Russian language and the state languages of Republics. The procedures for using languages within these territories are determined by the legislation of the Russian Federation and the subjects of the Russian Federation.
5. The state recognizes equal rights of all languages of the Russian Federation to their preservation and development. All the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation enjoy support of the State.

#### Article 4. The guarantees for protection of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation

1. The languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation enjoy protection of the State. Bodies of the legislative, executive and judicial power of the Russian Federation guarantee and provide social, economic and juridical protection of all the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

2. Social protection of the languages foresees implementation of scientifically substantiated language policy, aimed at preservation, development and study of all the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation on the territory of the Russian Federation.

3. Economic protection of languages assumes the purpose-oriented budgetary and other financing of state and scientific programmes for preservation and development of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, implementation of privileged taxation policy for this purpose.

4. Juridical protection of languages assumes ensuring of liability of legal and physical persons for violation of the legislation of the Russian Federation on the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

#### Article 5. Guarantees of the rights of the citizens of the Russian Federation irrespective of their language knowledge

1. The state guarantees to the citizens of the Russian Federation realization of the basic political, economic, social and cultural rights irrespective of their language knowledge.

2. Knowledge of a language or lack thereof cannot serve as a basis for limiting the language rights of the citizens of the Russian Federation. Violation of the language rights of the peoples and a person entails the liability according to the law.

#### Article 6. The competence of the Russian Federation in the sphere of protection, study and usage of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation

The field of competence of the Russian Federation through the supreme state bodies of the Republic in the sphere of protection and usage of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation includes:

- the establishment of the general principles of the legislation of the Russian Federation on the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation;
- ensuring functioning of the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation;
- promotion of the development of the state languages of the republics;
- creation of the conditions for preservation and development of the languages of small in number peoples and ethnic groups not having their national-state and national-territorial forms or living beyond their borders;
- assistance in learning the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation beyond the Russian Federation.

#### Article 7. The programmes of the preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation

1. The government of the Russian Federation elaborates federal purpose oriented programmes of preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation and takes measures for implementation of these programmes. Bodies of state government of the subjects of the Russian Federation can elaborate corresponding regional purpose oriented programmes.

The programmes of the preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation shall envisage ensuring the functioning of the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation, state languages of the republics and other

languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, assistance with publication of the literature in the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, financing the scientific researches in the field of the preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, creation of the conditions for distributing through mass media announcements and materials in the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, training specialists in the aforementioned field, improvement of the system of education aimed at development of languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, and other measures.

2. The means for financing the federal purpose oriented programmes of the preservation, study and development of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation or corresponding regional purpose oriented programmes are envisaged by the federal law on the federal budget for the corresponding year or laws of the subjects of the Russian Federation.

## **Chapter II. The rights of the citizens to use the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation**

### **Article 8. The right to choice of the language of communication**

In the spheres of communication subject to legal regulation according to this law the right to choice and use of the language of communication by the citizens of the Russian Federation is determined by the legislation of the Russian Federation and the subjects of the Russian Federation.

### **Article 9. The right to choice of the language of upbringing and education**

1. The citizens of the Russian Federation have the right to free choice of the language of upbringing and education.

2. The citizens of the Russian Federation have the right to receive basic general education in their native language, as well as to the choice of the language of instruction within the limits offered by the system of education.

The right of the citizens of the Russian Federation to receive education in native language is ensured by establishment of the necessary number of corresponding educational establishments, classes, groups, as well as by creating conditions for their functioning.

3. The right of the choice of the educational establishments with certain language of upbringing and instruction of children belongs to the parents or persons substituting them according to the legislation of the Russian Federation.

4. The language (languages) in which upbringing and instruction in the educational establishments are held is determined by the founder (founders) of the educational establishment and (or) by the charter of the educational establishment according to the legislation of the Russian Federation and the legislation of the subjects of the Russian Federation.

5. The citizens of the Russian Federation living beyond their national-state and national-territorial formations as well as not having these formations, the persons belonging to small in number peoples and ethnic groups enjoy assistance of the State in organizing various forms of upbringing and instruction in native language regardless of the number of such persons and in accordance with their needs.

### **Article 10. Learning and teaching the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation**

1. The State ensures to the citizens of the Russian Federation the conditions for learning and teaching their native language and other languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

2. The Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation is learnt in the establishments of general and professional education. In the educational establishments having the state accreditation, except for the pre-school establishments, learning the Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation is regulated by the state educational standards.
3. Teaching the state and other languages in the republics is carried out according to their legislation.
4. Every people of the Russian Federation not having its written language has the right to create the written form of its native language. The State ensures the necessary conditions for this.
5. The State creates conditions for scientific research of all languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation.

### **Chapter III. Usage of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation in the work of the federal state government bodies, government bodies of the subjects of the Russian Federation and bodies of the local self-government**

Article 11. Working language of state government bodies, government bodies of the subjects of the Russian Federation and bodies of the local self-government

1. Work of the federal state government bodies, government bodies of the subjects of the Russian Federation and bodies of the local self-government is carried out in the state language of the Russian Federation.

In the government bodies, bodies of local self-government, state institutions of the republics, along with the state language of the Russian Federation, the state languages of the republics can be used.

2. At the meetings of the Council of the Federation and the State Duma, committees and commissions of the Chambers, at the parliamentary hearings members of the Council of the Federation and deputies of the State Duma have the right to speak in the state languages of the republics or in other languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation providing the translation of the speech into the state language of the Russian Federation according to the rules of procedure of the Chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.

3. The language of drafts of the federal constitutional laws, drafts of the federal laws, drafts of acts of the Chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation submitted for consideration by the State Duma and transferred for consideration by the Council of the Federation, is the state language of the Russian Federation.

Article 12. The language of the official publication of the federal constitutional laws, federal laws and other legal acts of the Russian Federation

Federal constitutional laws, federal laws, acts of the Chambers of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, decrees and instructions of the President of the Russian Federation, resolutions and instructions of the Government of the Russian Federation are officially published in the state language of the Russian Federation.

In the republics the aforementioned legal acts, besides the official publication, can be published in the state languages of the republics.

Article 13. The language of the official publication of laws and other normative legal acts of the subjects of the Russian Federation

1. Laws and other normative legal acts of the republics besides the official publication in the state language of the Russian Federation can be officially published in the state languages of the republics.

2. Laws and other normative legal acts of regions, districts, towns of the federal subordination, autonomous regions and autonomous districts are officially published in the state language of the Russian Federation.

If necessary, the aforementioned normative legal acts besides the official publication can be published in the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation according to the legislation of the subjects of the Russian Federation.

#### Article 14. The language of preparation and holding of elections and referenda in the Russian Federation

1. In preparing and holding elections and referenda in the Russian Federation the state language of the Russian Federation is used. In preparing and holding elections and referenda in the Russian Federation, the republics have the right to use the state languages of the republics and languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation on the territory of their compact residence, along with the state language of the Russian Federation; other subjects of the Russian Federation have the right to use also languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation on the territories of their compact residence, besides the state language of the Russian Federation.

2. The ballot papers for elections and referendum are printed in the state language of the Russian Federation. According to the decision of the corresponding electoral commission, commission of the referendum these papers are printed in the state language of the Russian Federation and in the state language of the corresponding republic, and, if necessary, also in the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation on the territories of their compact residence. If for the polling station or referendum station the ballot papers are printed in two or more languages, the text in the state language of the Russian Federation must be placed in each ballot paper for elections or referendum. The protocols of the voting results, results of the elections and referendums are drawn up in the state language of the Russian Federation and, if necessary, also in the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation on the territories of their compact residence.

#### **Chapter IV. The use of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation in the work of the government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions**

#### Article 15. The use of the languages in the work of the government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions

1. In the work of government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions of the Russian Federation, the state language of the Russian Federation, state languages of the republics and other languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation are used

2. The citizens of the Russian Federation who do not speak the state language of the Russian Federation and the state language of the republic, have the right to speak at the meetings, sittings and gatherings in the government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions in a language they know. If necessary, the translation is provided.

3. The citizens of the Russian Federation who do not speak the language in which a meeting or sitting is held in the government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions, if necessary, are provided with the translation into a language acceptable for these citizens or into the state language of the Russian Federation.

4. The citizens of the Russian Federation have the right to address the government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions of the Russian Federation with proposals, applications, complaints in the state language of the Russian Federation, native language or any other language of the peoples of the Russian Federation which they know.
5. The answers to suggestions, applications and complaints of the citizens of the Russian Federation submitted to the government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions of the Russian Federation are given in the language of the address. If giving answer in the language of address is impossible, the state language of the Russian Federation is used.
6. Certain restrictions and norms for the use of languages in the sphere of professional communication can be envisaged by the regulations on language skill requirements in the Russian Federation.

#### Article 16. The use of languages in official business documentation

1. On the territory of the Russian Federation the official business documentation in the government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions is run in Russian as the state language of the Russian Federation. Official business documentation is also run in the state languages of these republics. The order of use of languages in the official business documentation is determined by the legislation of the Russian Federation and the republics.
2. The texts of the documents (letterheads, seals, stamps) and signboards with the names of the government bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions are drawn up in the state language of the Russian Federation, state languages of the republics and other languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, as determined by the legislation of republics.
3. Where necessary, the official business documentation in the subjects of the Russian Federation, besides the state language of the Russian Federation, state languages of the republics can be run in the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation on the territories of their compact residence. The rules of use of the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation in the official business documentation on the aforementioned territories is determined by the legislation of the subjects of the Russian Federation.
4. Personal identity documents of a citizen of the Russian Federation, civil status records, labour record books, as well as certificates of education, military documents and other documents are drawn up taking into account national traditions in naming in the state language of the Russian Federation, but on the territory of a republic which determined its own state language, aforementioned documents can be drawn up in the state language of the republic, along with the state language of the Russian Federation.

#### Article 17. The use of languages in the official correspondence

The official correspondence and other forms of the official relations between the state bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions of the subjects of the Russian Federation with addressees in the Russian Federation are conducted in the state language of the Russian Federation.

#### Article 18. The language of proceedings and documentation in the courts and paperwork in the law enforcement bodies

1. Proceedings and documentation in the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, the Supreme Arbitration Court of the Russian Federation, other federal courts of arbitration, military courts, as well as documentation in the law enforcement bodies of the Russian Federation are conducted in the state language of the Russian Federation. Proceedings and paperwork in other federal courts of general jurisdiction can be conducted also in the state language of the republic on which's territory the corresponding court is located.

2. In the People's judge and in other courts of the subjects of the Russian Federation proceedings and paperwork as well as paperwork in the law enforcement bodies of the subjects of the Russian Federation are conducted in the state language of the Russian Federation or in the state language of the republic on which's territory the corresponding court or law enforcement body are located.

3. Persons who take part in the trial and do not speak the language in which proceedings and paperwork, as well as paperwork in the law enforcement bodies are conducted, have the right to speak and give explanations in their native language or in any other language freely chosen by them, as well as to use the translator's services.

#### Article 19. The use of the languages in the notarial paperwork

1. The rules of determining the language of proceedings are extended to the language of the notarial documentation in the state notary's offices and other state bodies fulfilling functions of the notarial paperwork.

2. Documents are drawn up in the state language of the Russian Federation if a citizen who applied for a notary's services does not speak the language in which paperwork is done.

#### Article 20. The language of mass media

1. Publication of all-Russian newspapers and magazines, broadcasts of Russian TV and radio programmes are conducted in Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation. All-Russian newspapers and magazines can be published also in other languages according to the will of the founders.

2. In the mass media of the subjects of the Russian Federation, the Russian language, the state languages of the republics, as well as languages of the peoples living on their territories are used.

3. In translating and dubbing cinema and video production, the state language of the Russian Federation, the state languages of republics and other languages are used, taking into account the interests of the population.

4. The order of use of the languages in mass media is determined by the legislation of the Russian Federation and subjects of the Russian Federation.

#### Article 21. The languages used in the sphere of industry, communication, transport and power engineering

1. In the sphere of industry, communication, transport and power engineering within the entire territory of the Russian Federation, Russian language as the state language of the Russian Federation is used, as well as other languages according to the international and inter-republican agreements of the Russian Federation.

2. In the sphere of industry, communication, transport and power engineering at the local level, along with the state language of the Russian Federation, the state languages of republics, other languages can be used with the account of interests of the local population.

#### Article 22. The languages used in the sphere of services and commercial activity

1. The use of languages in the sphere of services and commercial activity is determined by the legislation of the Russian Federation and the subjects of the Russian Federation. The refusal of the service to citizens on the pretext of lack of the language knowledge is unacceptable and causes the liability according to the legislation of the Russian Federation and the republics of the Russian Federation.

2. Business documentation in the sphere of services and commercial activity is conducted in the state language of the Russian Federation and in other languages envisaged by the agreements between business partners.



## **Chapter V. The language of denomination of the geographical objects, inscriptions, road and other signs**

Article 23. The language of titles of the geographical objects, inscriptions, road and other signs

1. Writing of the titles of the geographical objects and drawing the inscriptions, road and other signs is made in the state language of the Russian Federation. The republics have the right to write the titles of the geographical objects and to draw inscriptions, road and other signs in the state languages of republics, along with the state language of the Russian Federation.
2. The subjects of the Russian Federation, where necessary, have the right to write the titles of the geographical objects and to draw inscriptions, road and other signs in the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation on the territories of their compact residence, along with the state language of the Russian Federation.
3. The order of use of the languages when writing the titles of the geographical objects and drawing inscriptions, road and other signs is determined according to the legislation of the Russian Federation.

Article 24. Duties of federal bodies of the executive power and bodies of the executive power of the subjects of the Russian Federation in ensuring the writing of the titles of the geographical objects and drawing inscriptions, road and other signs  
The federal bodies of the executive power, bodies of the executive power of the subjects of the Russian Federation must ensure the writing of the titles of the geographical objects, drawing and maintaining in proper order inscriptions, road and other signs according to the legislation of the Russian Federation, legislation of the subjects of the Russian Federation and international standards.

Article 25. *Excluded by the Federal law, July 24 1998, # 126-Φ3*

## **Chapter VI. The use of the languages in the relations between the Russian Federation and foreign countries, international organizations, subjects of the Russian Federation**

Article 26. The use of languages in relations between the Russian Federation and foreign countries and international organizations

1. The work of the foreign representations of the Russian Federation, foreign policy, external economic relations and other institutions of the Russian Federation is conducted in the state language of the Russian Federation and in the language of the corresponding country.
2. Treaties, agreements, and other international acts concluded on behalf of the Russian Federation are drawn up in the state language of the Russian Federation and in the language of another contracting party or in other languages according to the mutual agreement of the sides.
3. In the negotiations on behalf of the Russian Federation with the representatives of other countries, international organizations, the state language of the Russian Federation and other languages are used, according to the mutual agreement and to the international documents.

Article 27. The language used in the relations of the Russian Federation with the subjects of the Russian Federation

In the relations of the Russian Federation with the subjects of the Russian Federation the state language of the Russian Federation is used.

## **Chapter VII. Responsibility for violation of the legislation of the Russian Federation on the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation**

Article 28. Responsibility for violation of the legislation of the Russian Federation  
on the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation

Actions of the legal and physical persons breaching the legislation of the Russian Federation on the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation entail the responsibility and are appealed in the order prescribed by the legislation of the Russian Federation and the subjects of the Russian Federation.

President of the RSFSR  
B. Yeltsin

Moscow, the House of Councils RSFSR  
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