



"Multilingualism and tolerance"

Roundtable

On December 10, the Bishkek Press Club held a roundtable on the topic "Multilingualism and Tolerance" within the framework of the project "Increasing Tolerance Among Young People in Conflict Prevention" with the support of the OSCE Center in Bishkek. Representatives of governmental agencies, nongovernmental and international organizations, members of the Jogorku Kenesh of KR and journalists participated in the roundtable.

List of participants:

Moderator: Muratbek Imanaliev, president of the Institute for Public Policy

Ishenbai Abdurazakov, social activist KR

Valery Vishnevsky, chairman of the Slavic Foundation of KR of the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan

Vera Vygovskaya, executive director of the public association "Egalité"

Azimzhan Ibraimov, Acting Director of the Department of the State language Development

Ivan Kamenko, program director of PA "Egalite"

Lira Karagulova, head of the public association "Mejkulturnoe obrazovanie" ("Intercultural Education")

Irina Karamushkina, member of the Jogorku kenesh of KR

Kadyraly Konkobaev, professor of the Kyrgyz Technical University "Manas"

Begaly Nargozuev, member of the Jogorku Kenesh of KR

Svetlana Pak, executive secretary of the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan

Also, participants of the project "Increasing Tolerance among Young People in Conflict Prevention" were in attendance.

Muratbek Imanaliev: Good afternoon, dear friends, participants in the Roundtable. We continue our roundtables on the problems of tolerance. Of course, we are talking about tolerance within ethnic, religious and other cultural and humanitarian structures. Today, we have a more specific topic. Last time we discussed the culture of tolerance. Today, we will talk about multilingualism and tolerance, and the effect of multilingualism on the formation on the culture of tolerance.

Speaking of multilingualism and tolerance, we can find many examples in the past and today. We can talk about different countries, where multilingualism exists as both official and informal formats of communication. We usually talk about Switzerland, where there are four national languages; we also like to talk about Asian countries such as Malaysia, where there are three national languages - Malay, Chinese and Hindi. And a more recent phenomenon is English becoming an official language. It is the language of interethnic communication, and at the same time, English in Malaysia is the language of bureaucracy, i.e. all documents in Malaysia are written in English.

There is a problem for the former Soviet Union, for the countries that appeared in this space, and our country is no exception. As you know, there is the state language, there is the official language, but there are other languages, too. In any case, over eighty nationalities are represented in the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan, and among them, there are quite large ethnic enclaves, which sometimes also require their language to be also recognized as an official tool of communication between people.

I would like to ask our speakers: can multilingualism really trigger the formation of a culture of tolerance or vice versa? I think that today our distinguished speakers will try to answer that question.

I give the word to Mr. Begaly Nargozuev.

Begaly Nargozuev: Dear participants of the Round Table! Today's discussion is dedicated to multilingualism and tolerance. I think this is one of topical questions in Kyrgyzstan. I want to thank the organizers of the Roundtable for the invitation. In addition, I am very pleased that the discussion



is conducted in two languages, and I think it is a good sign and an important step toward tolerance.

In my speech, I'm not going to talk about the theory of tolerance, its history and trends of tolerance in the present. Experts can talk more about this. I would like to share my thoughts about multilingualism and tolerance in Kyrgyzstan.

As you know, Kyrgyzstan is a multiethnic country. During the time of the Soviet Union, there were about 80 nations. How many we have today, I do not know. But, in my opinion, in Kyrgyzstan, there is no multilingualism. Due to this, there is a very limited scope of tolerance in the country. We have bilingualism: the Kyrgyz-speakers know Russian; representatives of Uzbek, Uighur, Dungan and other nationalities, besides their native language, know the Russian language as well. Therefore, we can talk only about bilingualism. The Russian-speaking population constitutes approximately 30%. I think we should create conditions to ensure that our bilingual compatriots promote multilingualism, while the Russian-speaking compatriots should, at least, move to bilingualism. .

And here, I would like to pay more attention to the following issue: In Kyrgyzstan, the "Law on State Language" was passed 20 years ago. But during these 20 years, it has practically not been implemented. When the Law had just been adopted, we heard appeals, requests from our Russian-speaking compatriots that they should be given some time. However, after such a long period, they have not become bilingual. Although there was a time when there were established special courses, and it became a kind of fashion at the beginning of the sovereign statehood, but then the trend ended.

Most recently, our colleague Iskhak Masaliev said that people don't buy books in the Kyrgyz language, and the Kyrgyz language manuals and textbooks are not in demand. Now, we are required to create new instruction manuals. I don't think that this will help, though we must continue to work in this direction. But while we cannot teach our compatriots a second language, volunteers from Europe and America after six months speak understandable and tolerable Kyrgyz. I have witnessed this: they play the komuz and sing some tunes.

I think that, above all, there should be a personal desire of each person. If our Russian or Kyrgyz compatriots intend to learn the English language, they master it during six months, especially if they are to work in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or want to be diplomats. The state language is not difficult. According to experts, the Kyrgyz language does not belong to the category of difficult languages; it is quite possible to learn it. I think this problem will remain unsolved if we do not create any effective teaching aids.

Our state has been very tolerant with this issue. For twenty years, our state has given time and opportunity for people to learn the Kyrgyz language. And this tolerance will continue. But some people meet our new initiatives in the development of the state language with hostility; there is great intolerance in this matter among them.

You will excuse me for giving these examples, especially in my native language. I think not all of us here have tolerance with regard to promoting the state language.

The official language in Kyrgyzstan, in comparison with neighboring countries, develops slowly. As you know, in Uzbekistan the Uzbek language is not only the state language, they also changed their alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin. In Tajikistan, the Tajik language is recognized as the sole state language. In Kazakhstan, they pay great attention to the development of the state language. Recently, Nursultan Nazarbayev delivered a speech about the importance of the state language, which I admired and cannot hide it.

In Kyrgyzstan, no matter what kind of initiatives are proposed in the area of development of the state language, there is intolerance among some representatives of our Russian-speaking compatriots. I consider this a lack of tolerance. And they do not intend to learn the official language. I think it is necessary to support the development of the state language in reality. A single criterion for assessing the success of the development of state language should be the number of words, learned within a year or 20 years, as well as the criterion of the language proficiency level. That is how we should assess the language development. Instead, we have continuous demagoguery. We cannot talk about any development of the state language.



Today there is a colleague of mine here. Last year, we passed the law on television and radio broadcasting. There was a provision in that law, which caused big disputes: 50% of all television production of the companies, registered in Kyrgyzstan, should be broadcasted in the Kyrgyz language. We did not insist on broadcasting 70-80% of the TV production in the official language, like in some of our neighboring states. I would have described the actions of our television-radio companies in implementation of this rule as sabotage. Their main excuse was that they had no funds for the development of the state language. Why do they find funds for production of TV programmes in Russian, but not in the state language? They also referred to the fact that there are no specialists. But so many TV operators, journalists, filmmakers are jobless. The main reason is the lack of desire, tolerance, and toleration. Instead, they posed an ultimatum - only 20% of the production will be in the official language. Here, there is the same situation as it was with the implementation of the law on official language: 20 years have passed, but no development has been noticed. Television and radio companies are not eager to implement the provisions of the law. But, despite the fact that this law is not implemented, the government keeps its tolerant attitude, it does not use any penalties, and I think that it won't undertake anything in relation to these broadcasters. This is one example.

Here is another example. I recently addressed the Parliament with an initiative that, in Kyrgyzstan, cartoons should be made in the Kyrgyz language, foreign cartoons should be translated into Kyrgyz and classics of the world literature should be translated into Kyrgyz language. My colleague Irina Karamushkina acted as my opponent, she did not like it. Why did I raise this question? Not because I am a nationalist, but I just pondered: 70-80% of the Kyrgyz-population speak Russian, so why can't the Russian-speaking compatriots learn the state language even on the most elementary level? And I came to this conclusion: we watch cartoons, movies, read books in Russian – and our sub-consciousness keeps it. From each cartoon, a word or two of the Russian language become a part of our consciousness, of our flesh and blood. And our personal wealth, in terms of Russian vocabulary, is growing, and we are able to say, at least, a few words in Russian.

I see only a positive start in my proposal. Thus, we will create conditions for our Russian-speaking compatriots to gradually master the state language. Some of my former colleagues (I have worked as a journalist) have found some elements of nationalism in it. However, I do not see nationalism in this. If people want to learn another language, it is not nationalism. My colleague is also a witness: in September, the ex-Prime Minister Igor Chudinov came to the Parliament to make a report. I remembered that when he had taken his office, he said that very soon, he would master the official language – that he was learning the state language. At that time, I asked: "Igor Vitalievich, you promised to learn the state language. What is your progress?" I did not make any accusations or reproach, but the following day, newspapers reported me as a nationalist. You may find the transcript of that day and make sure that I did not make fun of anyone, nor did I humiliate or insult anyone.

Why do I cite these examples? Because should we move from bilingualism to multilingualism, we all must know what real tolerance is, what the real level of bilingualism and multilingualism is. I do not want to insult or offend anyone. Why couldn't we ask Chudinov, "What is your progress?" Cannot we even ask such questions? And will such questions be regarded as a manifestation of nationalism? I have already said that we have no tolerance, no multilingualism. We have Russian-Kyrgyz bilingualism. Nobody even talks about other nationalities and their languages - Dungan, Korean, Uzbek and others. If we talk about multilingualism, we should talk about them and their interests too.

The best example of multilingualism I have seen is in Belgium, when I visited the European Parliament. I participated in the European Parliament meeting, and I was just amazed. Twenty-eight country-members of the European Parliament had their own representatives, and each representative had his own booth, and each booth was provided with three simultaneous interpreters, who tirelessly interpreted all the meetings of the European Parliament into each of the languages of its members. Our former neighbors in the Soviet Union - the Baltic states, representatives of the Eastern Europe, Czechs, Poles - they all speak their native languages. And no problems arose during the meetings of the European Parliament; there is no language problem. Then, I understood why the Baltic countries escaped from the Commonwealth of Independent States and joined the EU. Because there, they can realize themselves as independent states. I was very impressed by this example. At the same time, the Baltic representatives, like our former brothers, spoke Russian to us, they spoke English to their European colleagues, and at meetings of the European Parliament they used their native language. I do not know why we cannot follow their example. I think we should use the enormous power of multilingualism.



In conclusion, I would like to say: if we want to promote multilingualism and educate the people in the spirit of multilingualism and tolerance, we need first to develop multilingualism, at least, in the Kyrgyz Parliament. We must develop multilingualism in the governmental and public organizations. Perhaps, you would laugh, but can you imagine multilingualism at the meetings of the CIS? And I think if we want to preserve the Commonwealth, as an intergovernmental organization, we should develop its multilingualism. My colleagues who are present here today, I think, will support me in this. I think each of us in our actions should reaffirm in practice our tolerance and toleration. Thank you for your attention.

Muratbek Imanaliev: Thank you very much for the interesting report. I think everybody understands the questions, raised by Mr. Nargozuev. I think we must avoid blaming each other for the lack of tolerance.

Knowledge, as we know, is stimulated by two things - curiosity or duress. I want to cite another example, with regard to the Baltic states. Mr. Nargozuev asked why the Russian-speaking population of Kyrgyzstan does not speak Kyrgyz? The Baltic States tried to "squeeze out" Russian-speaking people by very harsh methods, and those people had to learn Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian languages in order to stay and retain their citizenship. This was largely determined by the fact that these countries joined the EU. The people bore in mind that the standard of living would be different after the joining.

I will not summarize all that has been said, I'll simply ask the following question: What have the native speakers themselves done in order to make the state language an every-day language in Kyrgyzstan? It is only a question, and I think we will discuss it today. Now I want to give the floor to Mrs. Irina Karamushkina.

Irina Karamushkina: Thank you. Let me welcome you, dear participants, at the discussion of such an important issue. I think we have all needed this conversation for a long time. We are living in a beautiful country, but the question of state and official languages, of tolerance, has not been discussed much. Thank you for raising it. And we should discuss it at a high level; we should put aside domestic quarrels, obscure points of discrimination, which I have felt even working in politics. Although the Constitution laid down the rules of knowledge of the state and official languages, we have a bilingual state, and there is no discrimination against those who don't know the state language. But, for example, even in the Parliament, I almost always feel hidden and sometimes, even open discrimination because someone gets annoyed that I don't speak the state language.

Dear members, I would probably say as a historian. Once, Cholpon Tursunovna accused me that I have nostalgia for the Soviet time, and it can often be heard in my speeches. But it's hard to escape it. It is the history of our state. We, all together with our parents, created this history. We lived in this era. When fifteen republics, fifteen sisters lived together, I think it was a family. And in principle, many problems have been solved after the so-called "divorce." Now we have to cohabit, we will not run away anywhere, our planet will not break. We must look for the forms and ways to live and keep all good things that we can take from our cohabitation. And why are we talking about multilingualism today? Although I have been called "opponent," I have always said and will say that, today, in the twenty first century, bilingualism and multilingualism are really important and necessary. But in this matter, we must be very careful, in order not to cause harm. Our dear moderator gave an example of Lithuania and Estonia, where representatives of other nationalities began to learn the languages because they were squeezed out. Do you understand that this is a terrible method? This means that if we begin to squeeze out all Russian-speaking people, they will begin to learn the national language. If you want to live, you will learn.

Today, in schools and preschool institutions, the state language is being taught, children are learning it, because there are curricula. I'm sure that soon, many of them will speak their native language and the state language. In order to make a man interested in learning another language, he should see the prospects of its application. When I was working as the deputy director of the school #1, my friends taught me. And today, I'm proud of it. It helps me and I still maintain friendly relations with them. We, representatives of different nationalities, regularly meet with each other. And it enriches my life. A Kyrgyz, an Uighur, a Kazakh and a Tatar always understand each other, and I always envied that. I fail to understand them, because in our schools when I was a school girl, the Kyrgyz language was not taught. Today, I realize that is a problem; we should totally transfer to the state language. The state language should have been gradually introduced in business, diplomacy, etc. fifteen to



twenty years ago. I remember being taught the words: "Man 1-mektepte ishteym direktordun orun basarymyn." ("I am working as a deputy director at School#1.) And I liked to learn. But today, I am reproached, because I have not learned the national language yet. By the way, today, when I was coming to this Roundtable, I learned how much the courses of the state language cost. Almost like English courses - 3000 soms for 26 classes. There are also more expensive courses.

In any case, in our country, it is still possible to talk about it. We can still raise this question and discuss it, unlike in the neighboring countries. And this is how tolerance towards people of other nationalities is manifested. Yet, sometimes there are methods, which, perhaps, impede the good initiatives, the promotion and further development of the state language.

My eldest daughter graduated from the Slavic University with distinction, and, in principle, she can speak Kyrgyz, because the discipline was well taught, and the students liked it. Much depends on the quality of teaching. Unfortunately, there are no representatives of the Ministry of Education. They are engaged in monitoring and testing. The Ministry spoke of many reasons why, even in schools with Kyrgyz language of instruction, it is not possible to teach at a high level: there is lack of textbooks, or methodology is poorly developed.

Studies have shown that second language is "absorbed" better if it is used as a means of knowledge; for example, in the educational process. If the language is taught as a subject, it takes 9 years to learn it more or less well. Most schools teach 3 languages. This is great, the more languages a person knows, the more developed he is. He can read books; he can even hear proverbs in the original language. Sometimes, people say, "Irina, we cannot explain in Russian, some beauty is being lost in translation." And frankly, I suffer from not knowing the state language. It impedes my political activities.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are very important and necessary. I believe that we need to preserve what has been done over the years for the development of official language and to preserve the official language.

I am a member of the Commission of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of CIS countries. Previously, representatives of Tajikistan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and Moldova all speak the same language – Russian. And understood each other. But at the last meeting in St. Petersburg, representatives of Armenia were very young, and for them, it was very difficult to speak Russian. We already had difficulties in communication. But we cannot erase the history that binds us together.

Here you are talking about tolerance: tolerance toward other religions, other nationalities, to another person, and you have provided examples. But I feel the manifestation of intolerance toward me in the parliament. During the committee meetings, no translation into Russian is provided. So, Galina Kulikova and I displeased the other Parliament members, because they have to speak the official language, not Kyrgyz. And it offended me. The main thing is not which language a person speaks, but how much benefit he/she brings to the country. We are very worried about our country; we don't to less than those who speak only the national language. We should pay more attention to professional qualities.

You know, November 16 is the Day of Tolerance. I think tolerance should be taught already at school. Besides, special activities should be carried out in the Kyrgyz capital, and in the regions. We should also include the cultivation of respect for other cultures and nationalities. Incidentally, in 2008, 21 million rubles was spent for the cultivation of tolerance among the population of St. Petersburg. 21 million rubles only for St. Petersburg! There were exhibitions: "Children of different nations, we dream about peace" and "I, you, he, she – we are a strong family." Those are moments of nostalgia for the Soviet Union and were mass events; for which not only adults, but also children, were accountable and learned to respect each other.

We must learn tolerance and multilingualism; it is necessary. We just need to lead a correct policy in this regard. Thank you for your attention.

Muratbek Imanaliev: Thank you very much. It was very interesting. We have listened to two MPs who expressed their own views on the topic of our Roundtable. And I want to say that they spoke adequately to what is called "multilingualism" and "tolerance..And it was very helpful.



I would like to ask Ishenbai Abdurazakov, because he is to speak next. Is multilingualism a necessary element for the formation of tolerance? Or is it possible to speak 10 languages and not be a tolerant person? The question is rather complicated. The last Swiss referendum, in my opinion, showed that multilingualism may not necessarily encourage people to be tolerant and understanding toward one another.

Ishenbai Abdurazakov: I'll start with your question: how we understand tolerance. Tolerance, in my understanding, is not necessarily when someone agrees or accepts the opinion of others. This is just simple; it is recognition of human rights in something. If we look from this point of view, multilingualism and tolerance do not cause any problems.

Many legal and humanitarian aspects have already been described. Today, December 10th is Human Rights Day. On this day, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was entered into force. Now, in the world, there are more than two thousand ethnic groups. And each speaks its own language. But the problem arises at the state level. Of the 190 states, very few are mono-ethnic, and without problems. However, more than half of all states are multiethnic, and international migration intensifies this. Poly-ethnicity has become a trend. And it should be regulated at the state level, the level of the Constitution or other laws. It is necessary to enact laws, recognizing the right of each ethnic group to speak its own language, while at the same time, it is necessary to determine which language will be the working language of government agencies and which language should be the language of interethnic communication.

I think that we have created confusion from the very beginning - state language, official language ... Frankly, in practical terms I do not see such a big difference between them. There is no priority - if it is an official language, it is already becoming a working language. Another problem is how these two legal provisions should be applied in practice. I appreciate the opinion of people who say that we have very little evident concern about the state language - this is true. Since the state already exists, i.e. the titular ethnic group, we must take care of the state language. After all, it is a matter of honor and dignity.

But how must we do it? Here, in my opinion, is the problem. How do we care about this language? What do we do for the development of this language? I think the state authorities, the Government, have done very little in this direction. There is no real development of this language. Sometimes, I watch and listen on TV or radio how MPs debate in the Kyrgyz language, the state language. But, sorry, this is some other language. There is no culture of language, and the vocabulary is wrong. At the domestic level, it can be called the state language, but at the state level, it cannot be called so. This is the result of such an attitude to the language. I think the only man we have who speaks good literary national language is Alexander Kostyuk.

You see, our conversation today is based on emotions. I, for its part, cannot understand either how one can be born in a country, live and study, without knowing the language of this country. This is, after all, an elementary component of culture. When we go somewhere with Muratbek Sansyrbayevich, even for a five-day trip, we try to learn a few words in the language of the country where we are going, in order to say "hello" or ask something. But here people have lived for sixty, seventy years and do not know the language - this is actually a somewhat different matter. There are many reasons. First - uselessness of the language in its time. Hence, people were not interested in learning the language. People got accustomed to the fact that it is sufficient to know only the Russian language. A very big boss once surprised me. We arrived in Tokyo. The talks were going on. For some reason he kept asking questions directly to his partners in Russian and in the end he even said: "Listen, why do they not speak Russian?" You see, he thought that everyone should know the Russian language.

Now, it seems that the era of sobriety has come. We recognize that the world is complex, and we must therefore have an appropriate approach to it. Our generation has a very difficult task. If we talked about one language, then about two languages, now it's time to talk about three languages, including English. Outside the CIS, the Russian language is used almost nowhere. Recently, in Istanbul, I met with representatives of the Balkan countries and asked them: "Have you forgotten the Russian language?" They said, "We begin to forget"

Sometimes, questions arise at an emotional level. But now we are talking about patriotism and



nationalism. I understand it this way: to take care of one's own national language is, undoubtedly, patriotism. But to impose it by force - this is nationalism. We must create conditions that would facilitate the natural development and application of the state language. After all, development of any language is not a simple matter, and those who studied a foreign language know it well: it is very difficult. Have we, at least, created an updated semantic dictionary of the Kyrgyz language? Until now, it is "tuzulup zhatat" "still being marinated". Do we have a textbook on the culture of speech? No. Any language is not only its knowledge at the household level, it includes its style, richness of vocabulary and precise use of words, and terms. Terminology dictionaries have long been not produced. The parliament recently passed a resolution, saying that diplomats must hold talks in the Kyrgyz language. This is a very controversial issue. When the head of a delegation of another country comes, our president should welcome him in the state language, it is right. But how can we practically hold talks in the Kyrgyz language? We have no terminology; we are still developing it. We must first develop a dictionary of international terms, legal terms, so that each negotiator knows them and interpreters can use them. Otherwise, it won't work. Interpreting is a most difficult profession. And without addressing these problems now, it will be very difficult to progress.

So I think that you, dear Parliament members, must require specific actions from the Government. The most important thing is dictionaries. Without dictionaries we cannot do anything. If a person does not work with a dictionary, he has a very "lame" language. We should always have access to dictionaries. We must have samples of the best texts, poetry or prose. It doesn't matter; the main thing is that we should have some orientations. Begaly Nargozuev is right: we must make sure that, at least, cartoons are translated into good Kyrgyz. Kids watch cartoons, and in the Kyrgyz language, there is no cartoon. Classical literature should be also translated; and translated well. Look at street advertising – the translation is awful. I do not know who controls it. Sometimes I don't know what I should do - laugh or cry. Terrible confusion.

Muratbek Imanaliev: In Russian, the advertising is also terrible.

Ishenbai Abdurazakov: I agree. It seems like we have a fashion for illiteracy. Even in Russia, they cry from the fact how the Russian language is being treated today. I do not know how to call it. Anyone knows?

Vera Vygovskaya: It's slang. Moreover, slang has many words from the jail subculture. Once I asked a teacher of Russian with higher education where the organizer of an event was, and she answered, "He went to find some chow." And this has become the norm.

Ishenbai Abdurazakov: Because values have changed. Racketeers, corrupt politicians, criminals - they already dictate a cultural landmark. What a shame!

Let's be more tolerant, but let's take into consideration political moments, our national interests within the CIS. Domestic care should be enhanced three times, maybe many times, to put the language on a high level and to make it sure that it is a living language. Thank you for your attention.

Muratbek Imanaliev: Thank you, Ishenbai Abdurazakovich – although we have moved to discussing the issues of the state and official languages.

Before giving the floor to Azimzhan Ibraimov, who will make a last report for today, I will say a few words about the development of the state language. I grew up in a large family of philologists, linguists and literary critics. Therefore, I have reasons to talk about it. Let's start with the alphabet. You know, scale and phonetics of the Kyrgyz language does not correspond to the graphical representation of these sounds on the paper, i.e. letters. In the alphabet there are graphic images or sounds of letters that do not exist in the Kyrgyz language, and vice versa. Several times I spoke about this to the people from the Academy of Sciences, who see themselves as guardians of and apologists for the Kyrgyz language. But no one wants to do anything. That is what strikes me the most. I will give you examples. In the Kyrgyz language, there are no sounds "f" and "v", but they exist in the alphabet. And on the contrary, some sounds that exist are not represented in the alphabet.

Now, regarding nationalism. You know, do not be afraid, when someone calls you nationalists. I think it's normal. Again, an example: V.V. Putin said, "I am a normal Russian nationalist." He said it publicly. Nationalist does not mean bad.



Now about the languages. Ishenbai Abdurazakov said there are two thousand ethnic groups. I want to remind my dear friends, that there are many nations and nationalities in the world who have no language at all. Both Americas do not have their own language. There are such nations in Europe and in Asia, and they all live well. Among them there are very large and developed countries, where scientists discuss one very important issue: whether to use their native language as their native language, etc. There are many problems, but still I would like to return to the issue of multilingualism and tolerance. Therefore, I give the word to Azimzhan Ibraimov.

Azimzhan Ibraimov: Hello, dear participants of the Roundtable! I express my deep gratitude to the Institute for Public Policy for raising this issue. Today I also would like to speak in the Kyrgyz language. In order to provide at least a very general picture of what is being done in the development of the state language, I want to present books to you. This is a spelling dictionary of the Kyrgyz language with 80 000 words. In Karasaevs' dictionary, there are more than 60 000 words, and this dictionary contains 80 000 words. This dictionary includes new terms, worked out together with the Terminology Commission. It also presents new orthographic spelling of words.

We talked a lot about how to move to the state language. On this occasion, we have prepared a book - "The Method of Documentation Management in Two Languages" and our official materials are presented here as well as the law on the state language. These are our presents for you.

The fact that the Institute for Public Policy today is discussing an urgent issue suggests that public policy in Kyrgyzstan aims to promote tolerance and multilingualism. We can consider it true, because our country is home to several dozens of nations and nationalities that are living and working here as a family. Nevertheless, they have a lot of problems. Therefore, the Kyrgyz state, since the early days of its sovereignty, began to create conditions to ensure that all nations and nationalities could exist and fully develop their own languages. I note that in the Commonwealth, only in Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, the Russian language is adopted as the official language. Media in Russia and other countries of the Commonwealth have noticed this trend. Recently in Tajikistan, the Tajik language was recognized as the only state language, and this caused some deterioration in political relations between Tajikistan and Russia. But nevertheless, after a while, the President Emomali Rakhmon and the President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev met with each other. This proves that the state language should never become a political tool in interstate relations.

Kyrgyzstan adopted this law on the state and the official languages not to deserve the praise of other Commonwealth countries and other states. It adopted it to ensure that other nations and nationalities that are united in the multinational people of Kyrgyzstan, could develop and, at the same time, preserve their national identity, communicating among themselves. This means that the Kyrgyz state understands the needs and requests of individual nations and nationalities. Since the Kyrgyz are the titular nation, the Kyrgyz people take responsibility also for the development and full existence of other nations and nationalities that make up the people of Kyrgyzstan.

Meanwhile, we must not forget that it is necessary to care for the state language of Kyrgyzstan. For the language of the titular nation Kyrgyz can develop and exist only here. Our famous writer Zhusup Turusbekov said that his language should evolve in a way, which would not prevent the development of other languages, but other nations should not neglect the development of the Kyrgyz language either. I would say that national nihilism and forgetting our native language, which is adopted as a state language, is a shameful phenomenon. A famous Turkish writer said that it would be a huge mistake to treat the native language disparagingly.

Kyrgyz, as the state language, already has a huge material-technical base. Favorable conditions have been created for documentation management and communication in the Kyrgyz language. If in the 1990s, there was a kind of contempt and cautious attitude to Kyrgyz, there are now more and more of our fellow citizens who respect and love the Kyrgyz language. I must note this is obvious. The fact that the special status has been given to our state language says that it has potential for development in all spheres of life; for ethnic development. At the same time, Kyrgyz is the state language, which can be the basis for multilingualism in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. But it requires pragmatism and political foresight, prudence and sensitivity. I think it's not enough just to consider the Kyrgyz language as the basis for certain research in the field of language, history and other points; the Kyrgyz language has potential to develop inter-state, economic relations, especially if they are based on our historical ties with different nations. I think that there are many problems that the Kyrgyz language can solve.



Article 3 of the Law on State Language says that it is the language of international communication for the peoples inhabiting the country. And the chairmen of the supreme bodies of state and judicial authorities are obliged to know the Kyrgyz language; they must be able to speak publicly in Kyrgyz. We make changes and additions, so that akims, heads of state administrations and Parliament deputies also knew the state language, of course, to the extent necessary for the performance of their official duties. I want to say that these tasks are being already performed by our department - this is an important requirement of time. I believe that members of official bodies and public authorities must meet the current requirements. Many public institutions intensively establish public courses of the state language. Government agencies and departments, headed by the Prime Minister, are now studying the state language. These courses have been prepared by our department of the state language. There are educational centers. In order to fulfill the assigned tasks, we must adopt regulations and hold public hearings.

I would like to note that the National Commission on the State Language has already prepared a draft law on additions and changes to the law on the state language. But so far, it has not been considered, and I want to address the deputies of parliament with this issue. Before demanding to implement the law on the state language, we must, of course, train good professionals, create the necessary conditions, in terms of modern technologies and communication requirements. Recently, Kurmanbek Salievich said that it should be introduced through computerization to local authorities. We intend to hold competitions among the agency staff. We are now distributing textbooks, manuals and guides free of charge via the Internet. Terminological dictionaries, which Ishenbai Abdurazakovich mentioned, are also created and posted on the Internet.

If we want to ensure that all citizens respect and pay attention to the state language, we should take appropriate measures, both the government and the public. I think it is quite a logical requirement. Government officials may take special courses, which will help them master the state language at the appropriate level to carry out their functions. In this regard, we must make appropriate changes and amendments to the Act on the state language.

If we look at the statistics, in early 2009, the number of government employees was 17 900 people, and 80% of them were Kyrgyz. I cite these statistics to ensure that you understand that public authorities are ready to transition to the state language. Moreover, all administrative units, except Chui oblast and Bishkek, have already adopted the state language and manage documentation in the Kyrgyz language.

With regard to tolerance and multilingualism, of course, we must develop not only the national language, but also show concern about the development of languages of our compatriots. Today, there are governmental regulations and relevant orders by the President, government regulations. But, as Ishenbai Abdurazakovich said, our state language still cannot occupy the level it should occupy. And we, the Kyrgyz who live in the city, do not speak good language. Our commentators and journalists speak some kind of "newspeak" and it is they, people who appear in the media, themselves who must respect the rules and requirements of the state language. Thank you for your attention!

Muratbek Imanaliev: I want to thank all speakers for their interesting presentations. Do you have any questions for the speakers at this time?

Vera Vygovskaya: Today's topic is "Multilingualism and Tolerance." But despite all the attempts of Mr. Imanaliev to turn us back to the topic, we cannot move away from the problems of the state language. I would like to speak on the topic of this Roundtable. Multilingualism and tolerance are interrelated. The basis of tolerance is understanding, but we cannot understand each other without language. We do not know any other mechanism. Therefore the question of language is always very serious. Assuming the fact that we are so many, we should create the conditions for the development of all languages in Kyrgyzstan. This is not only about Kyrgyz and Russian languages; it is about all languages here.

In my veins there flows the Polish, Ukrainian and Russian blood, and I cannot decide which language is my mother tongue. In Ukrainian and Polish I know only a few phrases. As a child, I haven't been taught Kyrgyz either, and now I face the necessity to learn the language by myself. And I'm going to learn it, because it is necessary. But how? The learning centers are working poorly.



With regard to tolerance and multilingualism, the question is really complex. There is a rural school, where 51% of students are Dungan. But in this school there are only Kyrgyz and Russian classes. It is necessary to open a Dungan class, and our law on the language states that it is possible to do it on the initiative of parents and schools, while the state will pay the teachers. They reached the district administration, but there, the case stalled. The law is good, but it does not work.

Remember, in Soviet times, we had broadcasting in German. I think we can arrange broadcasting in different languages, represented in our country. Thus, we may reduce tension. Our organization works to reduce conflict building, and we are confronted with the fact that all the problems – social, economic, cultural and all others - burst into ethnic conflicts. Because, first of all, we ask: "Who are you?" Our first identification is from within the family, and then we carry it on throughout our lives. The way we are raised remains important.

So when we are talking about multilingualism and tolerance, dear MPs, we address, first of all, to you. I now convey the wishes of teachers, who are unlikely to have the opportunity to participate in such activities. They are all asking for the creation of conditions for studying the national language in villages – to create courses, paid by the State in accordance with the law. These are Novopokrovsky school number 2, where representatives of Balkars, Azerbaijanis and many other different nationalities are studying. We need multilingual schools. This is the first problem.

Second - about the study of the Kyrgyz language. The Slavic population is unwilling to study it. But if the level of education is higher, a person understands that this is necessary. To those who do not want to, I'll say, "If you do not like it, go away to Russia, they all speak only Russian."

But, on the other hand, today schools have done everything to make the Kyrgyz language disliked. This is for one simple reason. Several years ago we studied the problems of schools and their curricula. I'll tell you: one cannot learn English in our schools even at the elementary level. This is because, if during your first year, you are taught how to make questions, and during the second year how to answer them, no one can learn the language. Kyrgyz is progressing with difficulty for the very same reason. The Kyrgyz language textbooks for Russian schools and Russian language textbooks for Kyrgyz schools are written in such a way that learning the language is impossible. But our country has a wonderful experience of learning foreign languages - English and French. In this regard, I have a question to the persons responsible: maybe, we should use our experience? Now, there are great private teachers. Maybe, we should hold a large campaign to attract them to work?

Now, high-school graduates do not speak the state language. They do three errors in one word. Textbooks, translated into the Kyrgyz language, do not meet educational standards; they violated even the logic of presenting the material. It is necessary to translate the works of literature into the Kyrgyz language, but we must do it at a good qualitative level.

We need public policy aimed at promoting patriotism and the development of the language. But it should be done properly, only then will there be result.

Muratbek Imanaliev: Thank you. I would like to add something about history. From my point of view, the history of Kyrgyzstan is a history not only of the Kyrgyz. When I worked in AUCA, I asked those who were mainly representatives of the Kyrgyz population, "How did it happen that there are Koreans in Kyrgyzstan?" In fact, nobody could answer, and they all mentioned the Kulikov battle, World War I, etc. I did not shame them, I just said that those 15 thousand Koreans who lived in the Soviet Kyrgyzstan, are our fellow citizens. They are people who live near us across the yard, across the street. They have the same passports, the same rights. But no one knows how they came here. I'm not talking about other major ethnic groups, for example, Dungan. We do not know about each other and do not want to know, that's amazing.

And with regard to the fact that the Russian-speaking population neglects the Kyrgyz language, I would say that it is also relevant to some part of the Kyrgyz people. In the same American university, students who must learn the Kyrgyz language in accordance with the requirements of the University, openly told me (those were young people of 17-20 years old), "Why? A young man, son of a famous politician said, 'Why should I learn it? Will it be useful for me? I talk it only in the kitchen.' "

Ishenbai Abdurazakov: He will not become a minister.



Muratbek Imanaliev: He, himself, does not want to be a minister. The problem lies in the fact that today's young people do not want to be ministers.

Kadyraly Konkobaev: Dear participants of the Roundtable, I would like to address the following problem. Why do State and government structures exist? I think that any nation creates the State to ensure its welfare. If it is a multi-ethnic country, the interests of all peoples who live in this country must be met by the Government, the State and legislative bodies; as all public bodies should serve the people. For this, we need to work on two fronts. First, we need to educate peoples in their tradition. Second, we must think about the future of our country, and how the younger generation should receive education of good quality.

With regard to multilingualism and tolerance, the Kyrgyz, by their nature, tend to assimilate. I, as a linguist-Turkologist, visited all the historical places for the Kyrgyz. I saw the Kyrgyz, who became the Mongols, Chinese, Hungarians. The other day, I returned from the Aktubinsk region, where I met with the Kyrgyz, who moved there in the XVI-th century and became a Kyrgyz branch of the Kazakh people.

So, first of all, our government should engage in traditional education, to preserve our traditions and customs, especially the titular ethnic group and other nations. Any state, I think, should take care of the titular nation in all respects. And this nation has been slighted for years. The Kyrgyz have been infringed, both economically and socially.

What do we have now? The Constitution stipulates that the state language is the Kyrgyz language. But is this rule of the Constitution respected? No. The Law on the State Language was adopted 20 years ago. Have the articles of this law been respected for 20 years? No.

I conducted a research. Azimzhan was just talking to you, as an official, and he said that everything is ok. But in fact, not much has been done. I speak, as an ordinary researcher of the Kyrgyz language, my whole life was spent in studies. What do we have today? We have a Yudakhin dictionary, a brief grammar book of the Kyrgyz language, which was written in the 1960's, two explanatory dictionaries of the Kyrgyz language of 1961 and 1984. The first volume of the two-volume book and a manuscript of the volume have been lost - we have lost the schools of spelling dictionaries, which were created by Konstantin Yudakhin and Zhapar Shukurov.

Unfortunately, we now have no lexicographers, it is a terrible crisis. We have no specialists who create dictionaries. A linguist - whether he is a professor or an academician - who does not know the techniques for creating dictionaries, will never do it. I'm sure. What is now being published is not dictionaries. Such dictionaries do more harm than good.

Now, about the culture of the Kyrgyz language: There is no culture there. Who should preserve the culture of the Kyrgyz language? First of all, state figures, including MPs. Now in the speech of parliamentarians one can hear only dialecticism. They do not know the literary norms of the Kyrgyz language.

We can hear an opinion now that the Kyrgyz language is dead. Nothing of the kind. Colloquial Kyrgyz language has always lived, lives and will live. There are no problems with it. I calculated that in different countries of the world outside of Kyrgyzstan, there are more than five and a half million Kyrgyz. Kyrgyz colloquial language will always live, and there is no reason to scare people.

We have only one problem - a problem with the literary Kyrgyz language. This language has no standard dictionary and there is no regulatory grammar. There were spelling rules that were spoiled by weak specialists. Any spelling rule should live long. Look, how many centuries the rules of English have lived. In 1939, we adopted the spelling rules of the Kyrgyz language and didn't change them until 1953. Then there were some additions. Until the 1990s, everything was fine. We had educated intellectuals and competent journalists. And what do we have today? Check our newspapers - no newspaper complies with the law, which the deputies have passed. It's a terrible situation! The main enemies of the Kyrgyz literary language are journalists and Parliament deputies.

Now about textbooks: I have looked through all the textbooks of the Kyrgyz language for the past thirty years. None of them, except two or three, complies with the standards. You see, 70-80% of Kyrgyz textbooks are wasted rules on the Kyrgyz language. Thus, none of the school graduates of a



Kyrgyz school speaks good quality Kyrgyz. I believe that the Ministry of Education, the Government and MPs must radically change their attitude towards textbooks and not only the textbooks of the Kyrgyz language.

Forcing is not good for teaching language. To teach and learn the language, you must create a corresponding environment. Who should create these conditions? The state. And the 30% Russian-speaking population, above all, must take care of the Kyrgyz population, because you have no problems, but the Kyrgyz have very large problems.

Muratbek Imanaliev: Thank you. That was a very emotional, and very interesting presentation by Professor Konkobaev. I think many of us should think about his words, especially representatives of the titular nation.

But I do not agree with some points. I cannot agree that MPs and journalists spoil the language. Anyway, Kyrgyzstan, in this sense, is not an exclusive country. Listen to the MPs of other countries, English-speaking and French-speaking. It is a rare exception, when a politician speaks very high quality language.

I hope today we have had an interesting conversation; in any case, we have given stimulus for our further cooperation and partnership. I want to thank all who have spoken today for their interesting and very useful suggestions as to what is called multilingualism and tolerance. Thank you.