

THE RELATION OF THE COUNTRIES WITH SOVIET HISTORY

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My first question is about the relation of your countries with Soviet history and its influence on the national identity of your country today. This question is not out of this scope because we see that in order to anticipate the war and to understand Russia's intention it is as important to understand Putin's vision of history as much as to count the military equipment. We have two extreme examples today with Russia, where many Russians are nostalgic for the Soviet Union and Stalin is the most popular historical figure, and on the opposite side Ukraine, which started de communization, which dismantled monuments to Lenin after the Maidan Revolution and which now commemorates the memory of Holodomor, the forced starvation under Stalin, and this genocide was recognized by many countries, including Georgia and Moldova. I am not sure about Kazakhstan. You will correct me, Mr. Vassilenko, if Kazakhstan recognized it.

My question is where are your respective countries on this scale between these two extreme visions of Soviet history? How does this past continue to define your identity in the present? What is the influence of the Soviet period on your national identity today? 30 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, can we still speak about the post Soviet space? Is it still united, with the only factor that continues to keep this space together being the bilateral relationship with Russia, with different kinds of pressure on energy, security, and other different matters? How do you define yourself today, this space and you in this space? I will start with Mr. Vassilenko.

Roman Vassilenko, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan

Thank you very much. Thank you, Tatiana. Yes, indeed, 30 years have passed since the end of the Soviet Union and by now more than 50% of Kazakhstan's population is under 30 years of age, so they do not know how it was under the Soviet Union and they, basically like the entire country, are looking to the future. Going back to history, it was a complex history of us living under the Soviet Union. It is true there were positive things, but there were also negative things, and one only needs to mention collectivization, which caused the death of half of the population in Kazakhstan in the early 1930s, or the Soviet nuclear weapons testing in the eastern part of Kazakhstan, etc., or the location of gulags in Kazakhstan and the exile of dozens of ethnicities to our country.

Today, we would like to think of this space, as you call it, as our neighborhood and the neighbors with whom we need to build relations, mindful of our common history and the past of our common geography today, but also mindful of our common future, which we need to build together.

**Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean**

Thank you very much. Olga Rosca from Moldova?

Olga Rosca, Chief of staff of the Deputy Prime-Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova

Thank you. I think that language defines reality, so what we call it to a certain extent would define what it becomes. When the Soviet Union collapsed the countries, the 15 republics, resulting from that were called the newly independent states. Obviously 31 years on we no longer call them 'newly independent'. The Commonwealth of Independent States is not as relevant or appropriate. The post Soviet or former Soviet Union, that is the parts that we, Moldova, have not chosen and we do not necessarily see that it defines us now. Therefore, the preference is that we use the present and the future to define ourselves, so I would rather hear, instead of post Soviet Moldova, an EU hopeful Moldova, candidate for EU membership Moldova, reform oriented Moldova, western leaning Moldova or, shall I say, freedom loving Moldova. Pick what you prefer.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

Thank you very much. You mentioned the language. Can you remember, just for our audience, the percentage, the number, of Russian speaking people in your respective countries?

Roman Vassilenko

In Kazakhstan it is almost everybody and we pursue the trilingual policy of everybody needing to speak Kazakh, the state language, Russian, while also learning English.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

For you, Olga, your country?

Olga Rosca

It is a hard question because many people are indeed bilingual. If we were to look at the ethnic minorities, we have Ukrainians, we have Russians, we have Gagauz, who are ethnic Turks but are Russian speaking, so I would say, whereas many people are bilingual, around 30% would choose Russian as their first language.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

Thank you very much. Deputy Minister Darsalia, the floor is yours now with the same question about your national identity and the place of Soviet history.

Lasha Darsalia, First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia

Thank you very much. Frankly speaking, I was preparing to answer a lot of questions, but this is the question I have no idea how to answer because I do not know what Soviet is, so it is difficult for me to answer what is post Soviet. By the way, I am talking about Georgia. For me, it is like answering the question, 'Is France post British Empire because during 100 years in the



Middle Ages it was occupied by Britain?' It is so distant from us that, in spite of 30 years, I definitely would not qualify Georgia as a post Soviet country. In all this space, we can talk about post Soviet if something is like this and if there is such a concept behind it. There is post Soviet in Russian occupied territories. If anything is Soviet, you can refer to these places, but the 80% of Georgia which is unoccupied would definitely not qualify for that. Frankly speaking, it is even a bit, I would not say insulting, but improper after three decades to talk about whether these countries post Soviet.

Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean

Thank you, Mr. Darsalia.