



RUSSIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN GERMANY

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Abstract. *Russian is one of the languages which are learnt in Germany at any educational level. Though today it has lost its positions in the rate of foreign languages chosen by the Germans, there are many interesting projects and initiatives supporting and maintaining the status of the Russian language in Germany. In this paper, I am going to give an overview of the history of cultural relations between Russia and Germany, try to explain the reasons of the current situation and describe the perspectives of the Russian language in today's Germany. By way of examples, I will discuss such events and projects as "To4ka-Treff", "RussoMobil" and the activities of the Russian culture centers in Germany, as well as programs in Russian as a foreign language at schools and universities in Germany.*

Keywords: *Russian, Germany, language education, cultural relations, exchange programs, international cooperation*

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Russian-German relations have long historical roots in various spheres: in politics, economy, and culture. These include diplomatic marriages, cooperation agreements, the activities of the Hanseatic League, and cultural ties in the fields of visual arts, music, sciences, pedagogy, and theology.

Soviet-German relations were shaped by such factors as World War II and its consequences: the division of Europe, the conflict between the East and the West, and the split of Germany. In the postwar period, relations between the Soviet Union and the GDR, on the one hand, and the FRG, on the other hand, developed in different ways. The result of this in education was that in the GDR schools Russian was taught as the first foreign language and was a compulsory subject, and in the FRG was offered as an elective.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany, new foundations were laid for bilateral cooperation in the European context. Germany and the Russian Federation, relying on historical roots, were able to establish quickly close political, economic, civil, and cultural relations [2, p. 164]. Recently, a number of agreements have been signed between Germany and Russia, including those related to education:

- Agreement on cultural cooperation of December 16, 1992;
- Government agreement of October 9, 2003, on the study of German in the Russian Federation and the Russian language in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The knowledge of at least two foreign languages belongs today to the core competencies in the European space, without which development, education and professional activity are impossible [2, p. 163]. On this basis, Germany and Russia take the following measures:

- exchange of specialists, researchers and teachers to give lectures and conduct seminars on the German/Russian literature and language;
- cooperation in improving the methods of teaching Russian and German;
- exchange of pedagogical and methodological materials;
- student and school exchanges, exchange of teaching staff;
- organization of language courses for young people, holding competitions and contests on the knowledge of the foreign language;
- joint publication of textbooks on languages.

The governments of both countries expressed their desire to increase the number of students studying Russian and German, respectively:

- Agreement between the Government of Germany and the Russian Federation on cooperation in the field of youth policy dated December 21, 2004.
- Agreement on strategic cooperation in the field of education, science and innovation between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Russian Federation of November 4, 2005.
- Agreement on the establishment of common cultural institutions of July 7, 2012. On the basis of this agreement, the Year of Science 2011–2012 and the Year of Germany in Russia 2012–2013 were held, within the framework of which more than a thousand events took place in 50 Russian cities. In parallel, the Year of Russia was held in Germany. 2014–2015 was the Year of the German Language and Literature in Russia and the Year of the Russian Language and Literature in Germany.

Russia and Germany are united by mutual interest in each other:

“Germany is a preferred partner for many Russian figures in the cultural and scientific field. This is not least due to the prominent role of the German language in the Russian Federation: Russia has the highest number of learners of German outside the EU (ca. 2.3 million). German thus claims a solid second place behind English. The basis for the promotion of mutual learning of the partner language is the corresponding government agreement of 2003, which came into effect on December 23, 2011. Russia is also the country with the most DAAD¹ scholarship holders: in the current academic year 2013/2014 alone, more than 10,000 young Russian citizens are studying at German universities, including more than 1,000 with a DAAD scholarship” [6].

In addition to the above-mentioned bilateral agreements, a number of agreements were concluded that strengthen the position of the Russian language in the German educational system and contribute to the further development of the Russian language education in Germany:

- Regulations on the teaching of foreign languages of July 10, 1994;
- Foreign languages in elementary school, regulation dated February 10, 2005;
- The concept of bilingual education – a report and development proposals of October 4, 2006.
- Uniform requirements for conducting examinations in Russian as a foreign language of February 5, 2005.

According to the 1971 Hamburg Agreement, Russian can be studied as the first foreign language in high schools from the fifth grade. Instead of a compulsory foreign language, migrants may learn the language of their country of origin or Russian. In most federal lands, the Russian language is today offered as a second or a third foreign language in the gymnasiums. The total number of speakers of Russian in Germany is estimated to be from 3 to 4.5 million people [3, p. 11].

¹ German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst).

The study of the Russian language is offered in all federal lands in different volumes and forms for different age groups. The Russian language competes with other foreign languages, such as French, Spanish, and even Latin, as well as with the languages of the border states: Danish, Dutch, Polish, Czech, and Swedish [9, p. 22].

In eight federal lands of Germany, Russian is represented in elementary school. In preparation for primary school, there are kindergartens teaching the basics of the Russian language.

In secondary school, Russian is mainly taught as a second foreign language from the 6th or 7th grade. In some cases, the Russian language can be chosen from the 5th grade, as, for example, in the schools of Thuringia or in two gymnasiums of Rhineland-Palatinate. In many schools, Russian is taught as the third foreign language from the 8th or 9th grade.

In gymnasiums, the Russian language as an academic subject is most prevalent, but its position in the curriculum depends on the federal land. Basically, the school seeks to graduate students with a B2 knowledge of the foreign language on the European scale of proficiency. In most federal lands, Russian can be chosen as one of the final exams. At the State European School in Berlin, half of the subjects are taught in Russian, so a bilingual diploma is possible [1, p. 355].

Russian teachers make great efforts to attract as many young people as possible to learning Russian, especially those who do not have family ties with Russia. In recent years, many schoolchildren originating from the families of late immigrants began to study the Russian language. Russian speakers are the second largest language group in Germany. The Russian language courses often create an atmosphere of proficiency in Russian at a high level, especially with regard to oral speech, and this demotivates students who do not have a language environment in the family.

The Russian-German exchange of schoolchildren is conducted mainly within the framework of agreements between Russian and German schools in the twin cities. For information about school exchanges see [5].

Within the framework of school exchanges, the project “Russisch kommt!” (“Meet the Russian language!” or, literally, “Russian is coming!”) is also being implemented. Its participants are provided with methodological materials for conducting classes in the Russian language and culture. These materials include bilingual games about Germany and Russia, publications on language learning, etc.

In the “To4ka-Treff” project young journalists from Germany and Russia have the opportunity to exchange experiences and internships abroad. The main role in this project is played by the Goethe Institute in Moscow and the Foundation of German-Russian Youth Exchanges.

The “RussoMobil” project has been operating since 2010 with the support of the Russkiy Mir Foundation. RussoMobil is a mobile “office” of the Russian language and culture whose task is to motivate schoolchildren to learn Russian. Lecturers conduct classes in German schools aimed at promoting the Russian language and culture with the help of game techniques and creative tasks.

The objectives of the project are to rid schoolchildren of fears and stereotypes related to the Russian language, to show them that it is possible to learn Russian and that it is worth it, to form a positive image of Russia, and to provide students and teachers with new materials.

In addition to these projects, competitions and Olympiads in the Russian language, teaching staff exchanges between Germany and Russia and other activities to promote the Russian language and culture are held in Germany and individual federal lands.

A special role in this is played by such organizations as:

- the Russian House of Science and Culture in Berlin, a representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo (governmental institution for international partnership between Russia and other countries) in Germany where scientific and cultural events are held for native speakers of Russian living in Berlin and for all Germans interested in Russia [7];
- Russkiy Mir Foundation, created by the Government of the Russian Federation in 2007 with the aim of promoting the Russian language and culture abroad and inside the country [8];
- MAPRYAL, the International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature [4], and others.

Today, 89 bachelor and 57 master programs with the Russian language are open in Germany, 20 bachelor and 14 master programs in Austria, and 4 bachelor and 6 master programs in Switzerland. Experts point out the importance of learning Russian in higher education because there are close cultural and economic contacts between German-speaking countries and Russia. Despite the sanctions imposed, there are many representative offices of foreign firms in Russia, and Russia is the largest domestic market in Europe and is also characterized by a high purchasing power of the population. “Universities, adult education centers and private language schools also offer Russian courses – in particular, there is a demand for courses at the A1-A2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, whose main objective is the relaying of basic communicative competences in everyday situations” [2, p. 169].

Russian is considered to be a difficult language to learn because it has strong differences from German in the morphological system. However, if you look at Europe as a cultural and economic space and take into account the increasing development of multilingualism, the study of the Russian language is a great advantage. In Europe, there are three large language families: Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages. Most schoolchildren speak German and English, and thus have extensive knowledge of the Germanic language family. It is also desirable to have at least one Romance and one Slavic language. Command of at least one language from each language family makes it possible to count on good prospects in the European labour market. Business relationships are becoming increasingly internationalized, and for a successful career, communicative and sociocultural competences are needed, which are acquired just by learning a foreign language, for example, Russian.

Teaching the Russian language contributes to the promotion of the concept of European multilingualism. Russian is the official language of the Russian Federation and one of the official languages of the United Nations. This is the most common Slavic language and the language of international communication in the CIS. Russian acquires particular importance in the light of the Eastern enlargement of the European Union and the role of Russia in European politics. In addition, Germany borders such Slavic states as the Czech Republic and Poland, which increases the communicative role of the Russian language. A person who speaks Russian can communicate in many European countries, and for Germany, the fact that teaching the Russian language contributes to the integration of migrants is of particular importance.

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