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COMMITTEE ON CULTURE AND EDUCATION

DRAFT REPORT ON ENDANGERED URALIC MINORITY CULTURES

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Summary

The Assembly wishes to draw attention to the endangered status of Uralic languages and cultures. More than 23 million people in the world speak languages belonging to the Uralic family. Most of them live in nation-states of their own. In Russia, they include the speakers of more than a dozen Uralic languages totalling some 3.3 million living as scattered minorities. In addition, there are the Sámi living both in Russia and in northern regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland as well as a now very small number of Livonians in Latvia. There are also the Ingrians, who are classed as Finns, and the Setus, a branch of the Estonians, also living in Russia.

In order to preserve the Uralic languages and culture, thereby enriching a developing Europe, the Assembly should urge the Russian Federation and the other countries where these are present to support these people's languages, cultures and traditions, through education their own mother tongues and through publications and mass media in their languages.

I. Preliminary draft recommendation

1. The Assembly is concerned at the endangered status of Uralic languages and cultures in Russia. More than 23 million people in the world speak Uralic languages and, according to the 1989 census, nearly 3.3 million of them live as minorities in Russia. Not all of them even use their language in a regular basis.
2. Of the Uralic peoples living in Russia, the Karelians, the Mordvins, the Mari, the Komi and the Udmurts have their own eponymous republics, whilst the Khanty, the Mansi, the Komi-Permyaks and the Nenets have their autonomous administrative districts. Even in those areas, however, they are minorities, except the Komi-Permyaks. Statistics show that those who speak their national language or consider it their mother tongue have been constantly declining as a proportion of the population. Abandon of national languages has been most rapid among urban dwellers and young people.
3. With society and the economy in turmoil, the status of minority languages has become even more precarious as people are forced to concentrate on the problems of everyday life and earning a living. In the Nordic countries, the Sámis now have a statutory right to their own language, culture and native-language teaching. In the Russian constitution and in new language laws enacted by several republics, the preservation of national languages is supported in principle and their status of equality alongside Russian is recognised, but economic resources are not provided to implement these provisions.
4. In the Russian Federation, the language of instruction in schools in the Karelian, Komi, Mari, Mordvin and Udmurt republics as well as in the Komi-Permyak, Khanty-Mansi, Yamalo-Nenets, Nenets and Taimyr (Dolgano-Nenets) autonomous areas is usually Russian and national languages are taught only for a small number of hours a week, mainly in the lower classes of rural schools. As a result of the Soviet Union's nationalities policy and assimilation into the dominant culture, many of the languages of the indigenous peoples of central and northern Russia and Siberia have failed to develop into modern cultural ones.
5. Speakers of Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian attach value to their linguistic background, which is different from the Indo-European. Diversity of cultures and languages should be seen as a precious resource that enriches our European heritage and also reinforces the identity of each nation and individual.
6. The Uralic peoples living as minorities in Russia are not presenting any demands that aspire to political change, but are requesting support for their languages and cultures, several of which will probably become extinct without the support of official bodies such as the Council of Europe.
7. The Assembly recalls its recent Recommendations 1291(1996) on Yiddish culture and 1333 (1997) on the Aromanians, which refer to the establishment, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, of a research centre for minority cultures. The tasks of this body would be to help these minorities preserve their cultural traditions and awareness of their past, to support the collection and recording of linguistic monuments and oral tradition, help publish material in their own languages and, in general, do its utmost to prevent European languages

and cultures from disappearing. This is considered very important and the research centre should also be assigned a monitoring function.

8. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers support the countries where the Uralic linguistic minorities live and in particular the Russian Federation in their efforts to guarantee a living future on the cultural map of Eurasia for such minorities. The following principles should be taken into account:

i. The native-language school is the foundation on which to revive and develop languages and cultures. Therefore the states in question should be encouraged and supported in providing children with teaching in their mother tongue, first in the lower classes of elementary schools and later gradually extended to higher classes. Native-language schools should be established in towns and cities as well as in rural areas.

ii. As a basis for ethnic schools and native-language instruction, teaching aids and learning material will first have to be provided in those languages. Efforts will also have to be made to support teacher training. Achieving these goals presupposes positive attitudes in policies on minorities and the allocation of resources for reforming teaching, training teachers and procuring educational material.

iii. A prerequisite for the preservation of languages is their active use in all written and oral communication. Therefore newspapers, radio and TV programmes and other electronic media in minority languages must be maintained and contacts between national minorities living in different republics and regions must be ensured.

iv. Exchanges of personnel and students between the Uralic areas and universities, research institutes and state bodies in other countries should be stepped up. Cultural exchanges of performing artistes, writers, etc. between different minority peoples likewise reinforce their own identity and create links with a multicultural world. In addition to that, aid should be channelled to various organisations and societies to enable them to work on the local level to revive and protect native languages.

v. The Uralic peoples should be taken into consideration in the implementation of Recommendation 1291 (1986), especially in relation to the research centre for ethnic minorities.

vi. Heritage sites such as the old town of Tsygma (Kozmodemyansk) should be placed on the World Heritage List of Unesco in order to preserve old round-log buildings and wood carvings.

II. Explanatory Memorandum

By Mrs Isohookana-Asunmaa

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1 Introduction

The aim of this report is to draw the attention of the Council of Europe to the situation of the Uralic peoples. Some of their languages and cultures are classed as endangered and some as highly endangered. The Uralic peoples who live as minorities in Russia are very different in numerical size and culture and live in a wide and diverse range of geographical and ecological conditions. For centuries these peoples have lived alongside the Russian and Turkic peoples and have nevertheless managed to preserve their mother tongues, cultures and, in part, also their religions to this day.

Using the situation with respect to their preservation as the criterion, the Uralic languages are grouped into four categories:

- a) languages which are under no apparent threat (Hungarian, Finn, Estonian);
- b) languages who may be endangered (Mordvin, Mari, Komi, Udmurt);
- c) Endangered languages (Khanty, Mansi, Nenets, Karelian, Vep); and
- d) Highly endangered languages peoples (Livonian, Vot, Izhorian and most Samoyed and Sámi languages).

2 Uralic languages and peoples

The Uralic languages are spoken in northern, eastern and central Europe and in Siberia. The only factor that unites the more than twenty languages in the Uralic family is that they can be traced back to a proto-language that existed 6,000 years ago. In the same way, the European languages (such as English and French) belonging to the better-known Indo-European family also evolved from a common ancestor. The Uralic peoples differ considerably from each other in the cultural sense (Appendix 1).

The regions inhabited by peoples speaking Uralic languages stretch from the Baltic and the Kola Peninsula through the middle reaches of the Volga all the way to western Siberia. A considerable part of these peoples live in republics and autonomous areas named after them: the Karelia, Komi, Mari El, Mordvin and Udmurtia republics and the autonomous areas of Khanty-Mansi, Yamalo-Nenets, Nenets, Komi-Permyak and Taimyr. Outside these areas, Uralic peoples live in the Kirov, Leningrad, Murmansk, Nizhniy Novgorod, Orenburg, Pskov, Perm, Penza, Samara, Saratov, Sverdlovsk, Tomsk, Tver, Ulianovsk and Vologda regions and in the Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Chuvash republics (Appendix 2).

The Uralic languages are divided into two sub-groups: Finno-Ugrian and Samoyedic. The former includes the Finnic languages, Sámi, Mordvin, Mari (Cheremis), Udmurt (Votyak), Komi (Zyrian), Hungarian, Khanty (Ostyak) and Mansi (Vogul). The Samoyedic languages include Nenets (Yurak), Nganasan (Tavgi), Enets (Yenisei Samoyed) and Selkup (Ostyak Samoyed).

Two kinds of names are used for speakers of Uralic languages, old and new. The names used in this memorandum are mainly the new ones (e.g. Mari), which are derived from the languages in question and accepted by the speakers themselves. However, since old names (such as Cheremis for Mari) appear in old sources, it is appropriate to mention them also in this text.

2.1 Finnic languages

The Finnic peoples are the Finns, the Karelians, the Vepsians, the Izhorians, the Votes, the Estonians and the Livonians. All live in the Baltic region between Scandinavia and Continental Europe. Their languages are fairly closely related and speakers of one can usually understand the others rather well. The Karelians, Vepsians, Izhorians and Votes live within the borders of the Russian Federation.

The **Karelians** (about 130,000 people) have lived in the area of the present Karelian Republic since ancient times. The linguistic enclave near the city of Tver owes its origin to Karelians who settled there in the 17th century. The Karelian national tradition remained lively until the beginning of the 20th century. Most of the poems in the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*, are based on material collected from rune singers in villages in the wilderness areas of northern Karelia. Today, a considerable proportion of Karelian speakers, especially young people does not command the language of their nationality. The language of education and culture is mostly Russian, and for some people living in the Karelian Republic also Finnish. The oldest written document of the Karelian language is probably the so-called Novgorod Birchbark Letter dating from the 13th century. The first printed works appeared in the 19th century. Development of three written variants of Karelian based on various dialects has begun in recent years.

The **Vepsians** (about 12,000) live in the Karelian Republic and in the Leningrad and Vologda regions. Their Russification has been more intensive than in the case of the Karelians: language of education and culture is Russian. However, recent years have seen an awakening of interest in Vepsian national culture and efforts are being made to preserve it for future generations. Several schools in the area where Vepsian is spoken have taken the language into their curricula. However, problems include a lack of textbooks and questions concerning the development of orthography.

The **Izhorians** (about 800 people) live in Ingria (Ingermanland), which stretches westward from St. Petersburg as far as the Estonian border and northwards as far as the Karelian Isthmus between Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland. They are mentioned in Russian documents dating back as far as the 13th century. Under Russian influence, they embraced the Orthodox faith. The number of speakers of Izhorian dialects has been declining rapidly since the 19th century and their language of culture is nowadays Russian. Educational and information material was produced on a small scale in the 1930s.

The **Votianss**, who nowadays number only a few dozen, likewise live in Ingria. The earliest reference to them in Russian documents dates from the 11th century. In common with the Izhorians, the Karelians and the Vepsians, they came under the influence of Novgorod and subsequently Moscow not later than the 11th century. As recently as the middle of the 19th century, there were still around 5,000 Votes. Strong assimilation first with the Izhorians and later with the Russians has led to the present situation in which the Votian language is on the brink of extinction. The language has never been written.

2.2 Sámi languages

It is estimated that a total of 50,000 - 80,000 **Sámi** live in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia and that about half of them speak Sámi languages as their mother tongue. There are many Sámi dialects, so different from each other that they can be considered separate languages. At least three different Sámi languages are spoken in each of the countries in which the Sámi peoples live.

In Russia, about 2,000 Sámis live on the Kola Peninsula in the Murmansk region. The history of Sámi settlement has been one of constantly retreating before the advancing dominant population. The borders of the areas of Sámi habitation have not changed in the present century, but the Sámi have been becoming an increasingly small minority within these areas. At the same time, the pattern of Sámi livelihoods has undergone substantial change.

The Sámi's ancestors inhabited Karelia from the White Sea to Lake Onega as well as nearly the whole of present-day mainland Finland. Today, three Sámi dialects are spoken in Russia: **Akkala**, **Kildin** and **Turya**. Kildin has the largest number of speakers and orthography was developed for this language in the 1930s, but remained in use for only a few years. A second attempt to develop a written form of the language began in the 1970s and to date two alphabet primers and a dictionary have been published in Kildin. Obstacles in the way of the orthography being adopted are largish differences between dialects, a lack of standardisation in spelling, the small size of the Sámi intelligentsia and the fact that young people no longer speak the language. The number learning Sámi as their mother tongues has been constantly declining. The situation of the Sámis in Russia is considered very serious.

2.3 Mordvins languages

In the 1989 census some 1.1 million **Mordvins** were counted and 67% of them stated Mordvin as their mother tongue. The Mordvins live in smallish scattered groups across a wide stretch of central and eastern Russia. In the Republic of Mordovia they number 339,000 or 34.2% of the total population. The majority of Mordvins live as scattered groups in the Samara, Nizhniy Novgorod, Orenburg, Penza, Saratov and Ulianovsk areas, the Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Chuvash republics as well as in small numbers in other parts of European Siberia. Their traditional livelihood is agriculture and, to a lesser extent, livestock rearing and forestry. In more recent times, naturally, growing numbers of them have taken up industrial occupations.

The Mordvins are divided linguistically and ethnically into two groups, the **Erzya** and the **Moksha**. They are the oldest known inhabitants of the central Volga region. The first reliable mention of the Mordvins is by the historian Jordanes in the 6th century. They were given their own autonomous area in 1930. In 1934 it was reconstituted as the Mordovian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and in 1991 became the Republic of Mordovia .

The Mordvins' rich folk poetry has been associated with wedding traditions and myths. The first Mordvin publication was a catechism printed in Erzya in 1806. The first Moksha book, likewise a catechism appeared in 1861. After the October Revolution in 1917, standard orthographies for both languages were created. The volume of Mordvin literature has been increasing slightly, although the current economic plight of Russia is slowing down its

production and distribution. The magazines *Mokša* and *Sjatko* and several newspapers are published in Mordovia. The Mordvin sculptor Ersä (1867-1959) worked and held exhibitions both in his homeland and several places abroad, including France and Argentina.

The **Mari (Cheremis)** number about 670,000 (1989) and around 80% state their mother tongue as Mari. They inhabit the central reaches of the Volga, about half of them living in the Mari El autonomous republic and the remainder in the Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Udmurt republics as well as in the Kirov, Perm and Sverdlovsk regions. Their traditional livelihoods are farming and livestock raising. Hunting and fishing are nowadays only of minor importance as a result of growing industrialisation.

The first definite mention of the Mari is in a letter written by the ruler Josif in the 10th century. Like the Mordvins, the Mari came under the rule of the Mongols and Tatars and later the Russians. The Mari autonomous area was created in 1926 and in 1936 reconstituted as the Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1991 it renamed itself Mari El to become an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation.

The Mari have two main groups of languages, Western and Eastern Mari. Brief religious texts in Mari were written as early as the 18th century and the first printed book was a catechism that appeared in 1808. *Marla tar*, a publication containing popular articles and items of fiction, appeared in the early years of the 20th century. Two written languages, Mountain Mari and Meadow Mari, have been in use since the late 1930s. Magazines, such as *Ontšyko kursiivi pois U sem*, and a few newspapers and children's magazines are nowadays published. The Mari handicraft tradition is still cherished in rural areas.

2.4 Pemian languages

According to the 1989 census, the **Komi** (Zyrians) number approximately 497,000 and around 70% of them consider Komi as their mother tongue. They are divided into two groups: the **Komi-Zyrians**, of whom there are 345,000, and the **Komi-Permyaks**, who number 152,000. About 63% of the former live in their own republic, where they represent about a quarter of the total population. Around 63% of the Komi-Permyaks live in their own autonomous area, where they also form the majority. Farming and livestock raising, and in northern regions reindeer herding, remain important livelihoods. In addition to these, forest products manufacturing, iron and coal mining and oil and gas production have brought prosperity to the republic.

The Komi autonomous area was created in 1921 and in 1936 reconstituted as the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1991 the Komi Republic became part of the Russian Federation. The Komi-Permyak Autonomous Area was created in 1925.

Of the Finno-Ugrian languages, Komi is (after Hungarian) the second oldest written one. It was developed in the 1370s by St Stephen of Perm, who published an alphabet primer and translations of religious texts. The first publication in modern Komi was the Gospel According to St. Matthew, printed in 1823. The magazine *Vojvyj kodzuv* and some works of fiction and non-fiction in addition to newspapers are nowadays published in Komi.

The 1989 census gave the number of **Udmurts** (Votyaks) as 7467,000, of whom 70% consider Udmurt as their mother tongue. Most of them live in the autonomous Republic of

Udmurtia, where they represent around 35% of the total population. There are also Udmurts living in the Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and Mari El republics and in the Kirov, Sverdlovsk and Perm regions. Traditional farming and livestock raising are still the main livelihoods in addition to the arms industry.

The Udmurts are the oldest known inhabitants of their present homeland, which came under Russian rule in the 16th century. The Votyak Autonomous District was formed in 1920 and in 1934 became the Udmurt Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1991 the Udmurt Republic or Udmurtia became part of the Russian Federation.

Udmurt literature came into being in the 19th century when religious texts began to be translated. An Udmurt calendar containing easily comprehensible articles and works of fiction was published in 1905-08. The first Udmurt newspaper appeared in 1913. Today, a few newspapers and magazines, including the literary magazine *Keneš*, and some works of fiction and non-fiction are published in Udmurt.

2.5 Ugrian languages

The **Khanty** (Ostyaks) and the **Mansi** (Voguls) live in the Yamalo-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi autonomous areas. The 1989 census gave the number of Khanty as 22,500, of whom 67% considered Khanty as their mother tongue. The Mansi were shown by the same census to number 8,500, with 37% speaking Mansi as their mother tongue. They live as the Khanty's western neighbours. The main livelihood in the northern part of their homeland is reindeer herding; further south, in the forest zone of western Siberia with its abundant lakes and rivers, reindeer herding is supplemented by fishing and hunting.

The 11th-century Chronicle of the Monk Nestor mentions the Khanty and the Mansi as the *Jugra*. Since the 1950s, growing exploitation of oil and gas finds in western Siberia has brought industry and new inhabitants to the region and this has made further inroads into the Khanty's and Mansi's traditional way of life. Large-scale pollution of the environment poses a threat both to the Khanty and Mansi themselves and to their traditional livelihoods.

The characteristic feature of the culture of the Khanty and Mansi, in common with that of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic, is a view of the world, religion and customs based on nature and livelihoods. Their languages have been written on only a very limited scale. Some religious texts were produced in the latter half of the 19th century and a few textbooks and some items of information material were printed in the 1930s. The first book printed in Mansi was the Gospels According to Sts. Matthew and Mark in 1868. An alphabet primer was published in 1903 and some text and information books have appeared from the 1930s onwards. One newspaper in Khanty and Mansi is currently appearing. Both Khanty and Mansi contain several dialects, and this has hampered the development of a standard literary language.

2.6 Samoyed languages

There are four different Samoyed peoples. The **Nenets** (Yuraks), who number about 35,000, live in a vast area of tundra stretching along the coast of the Arctic Ocean from the Kola Peninsula to east of the Yenisei Gulf, in the headwater areas of the Pur and Nadym rivers in Siberia, along the northern tributaries of the Ob and in the Komi Republic. About 77% of them consider Nenets as their mother tongue. The **Enets** (Yenisei Samoyeds), numbering about 200, inhabit the tundra along the lower reaches of the Yenisei and to the east of the Yenisei Gulf as well as the environs of the town of Dudinka. The **Nganasans** (Tavgis), numbering about 1,300, live on the Taimyr Peninsula and are the Russian Federation's northernmost people. The **Selkups** (Ostyak Samoyeds) number around 3,600 and live along tributaries of the Ob. The **Southern Samoyeds**, which comprised several tribes (Mastor, Yurats, Kamas), have been Russified and Tatarised and their languages are extinct.

The main livelihood in tundra areas is reindeer herding, which is supplemented by hunting and fishing in the forest zone. Only in the Nenets and Selkup languages has any written material been produced. Most of the small volume that exists is educational and information material. Most of the Samoyed peoples are nowadays classed as highly endangered.

3 Traditional livelihoods, changes in the environment and preservation of culture

The peoples of Russia do not enjoy statutory rights to use the land and waters of the areas that they inhabit. Indeed, in the northern tundra and forest zones, ecological problems are endangering the traditional cultures of the indigenous peoples there, the Khanty, the Mansi, the Sámis and the Samoyeds, and thereby also their languages. Natural livelihoods, hunting, fishing and reindeer herding, are still important, but are threatened by the still-expanding oil and gas industry in western Siberia. The languages and cultures of peoples who live by fishing, hunting and herding reindeer are closely tied to their traditional living habitats.

The preservation and development of the cultures and livelihoods of indigenous peoples should be made a primary objective in many projects, both national Russian and international ones. Adaptation of traditional livelihoods and their associated ways of life to modern conditions can be achieved with the aid of education. In fact, Sámis in the Nordic countries and Russia have already had some co-operation projects in such areas as reindeer management.

4 Recent history

In general, the 1920s brought positive prospects for the development of national languages and cultures in Russia. Several of the eastern Finno-Ugrian literary languages established themselves. Written forms were created for even very small national languages, such as Karelian, Vepsian, Khanty and Mansi. Teaching through the medium of children's own mother tongues was developed; schools and classes were provided for minorities. Literature in national languages and national cultural aspirations were supported.

After such a good start, the development of minority peoples' languages and cultures in Russia suffered a severe setback in the latter half of the 1930s, when their own cultural and social efforts were condemned as nationalism and national *intelligentsias* were liquidated. The results were devastating for small nations and the cultural lives of many of them, including

Finno-Ugrian peoples, have not to this date fully recovered from the persecution that they suffered. After Stalin's death in 1953, the general climate in the Soviet Union gradually began to become more tolerant.

Since the Second World War there have been no efforts to encourage minority peoples to engage in independent cultural activities, whilst measures that promote assimilation have been supported. Intense and crude exploitation of the natural resources of northern regions, the opening up of oil and gas fields and the establishment of large industrial complexes are examples of actions that have polluted the environment, got in the way of the indigenous peoples' livelihoods and accelerated inward migration from other parts of Russia. This has tended to promote the assimilation of small peoples. A reform of the schools system that began in the late 1950s considerably reduced the numbers of hours devoted to teaching minority children in their own languages. This contributed to weakening the status of Finno-Ugrian languages in society and reducing the numbers of people fluent in them (Appendix 3).

5 Present situation

The Russian Federation is a federal state inhabited by more than 170 nations and nationalities, each of which has its own material and immaterial culture. The emergence of the Russian Federation as an independent state in the early 1990s encouraged the Uralic minority peoples there to work to save their languages, cultures and national identities. As early as the latter half of the 1980s, researchers and artists representing national forces in the republics bearing the names of Finno-Ugrian minorities living in central Russia had become active, mainly focusing their attention on Hungary, Estonia and Finland.

In 1992 both Finland and Russia signed a state treaty and a cultural agreement in which they undertook to support the preservation of the languages and distinctive cultures of the Finnish kindred peoples in Russia and cultural links between these peoples and Finland. On the basis of the agreements, a programme of action to support these peoples and their cultures was drafted in Finland in 1993.

Implementation of the Finnish national programme of action began in 1994. Responsibility for this has been entrusted to the M.A. Castrén Society, a non-governmental cultural body. In accordance with the main goals defined in the programme, principal attention has been focused on co-operation in the field of education and producing educational material in national languages, exchanges of personnel, training researchers to work in the humanities, developing information services, supporting literature in national languages and translations, co-operation in information work, and cultural exchanges.

The main intention in allocating funds for the kindred peoples' programme has been to concentrate on developing these peoples' native-language culture and reinforcing their identities. The production of teaching aids and textbooks is an example of the measures that have been supported within the framework of the programme. Seminars for writers and editors of educational books and for directors and staff of national museums and libraries as well as training courses for researchers have been arranged in Finland in order to develop co-operation in educational and information services. National organisations have been given grants to support their activities. A further aim, that the cultural exchanges provided for in the programme of action are expected to help achieve, is that of promoting interaction between different sectors of cultural life and making the cultural heritage of the Uralic peoples better

known in Finland. Most of the funds allocated for the kindred peoples' programme each year have been spent directly on supporting education.

The Russian Federation has also drafted its own national support programme with the aim of reviving and developing Finno-Ugrian cultures. The intention is to explore the existing cultural resources of the Finno-Ugrian peoples living in Russia, to develop measures to revive them and to put in place the personnel resources and economic base needed to develop them. The first phase of the programme covered the period 1996-97 and the second applies to 1998-2000. The central goals of the programme are to preserve cultural and historical monuments, gather archive and museum collections, restore and protect important cultural sites, support traditional livelihoods and occupations, support traditional culture, promote information mediation, develop teaching and broaden cultural exchanges and contacts between Finno-Ugrian and other peoples. Implementation of the programme is the responsibility of the Russian Ministry of Nationalities and Federal Affairs and the relevant federal authorities. The programme is still at the draft stage and has not yet been approved by the Duma.

As a result of the first World Congress of Finno-Ugrian Peoples in 1992, an executive body called the Finno-Ugrian Peoples' Consultative Committee was set up. With members drawn from the various nationalities, its task is to co-ordinate the activities of all of the national organisations so as to work towards the achievement of common goals and promote the interests of the peoples in question in international organisations and fora, including the UN. The central goals are to develop legislation concerning Finno-Ugrian peoples in accordance with international norms and principles and without violating the interests and rights of other peoples, to revive and develop the cultures and languages of Finno-Ugrian peoples and to promote awareness of the cultural and scientific achievements of the Finno-Ugrian peoples. The third World Congress of Finno-Ugrian Peoples is to be held in Finland in 2000.

6 Language laws and development plans for language and culture

The Constitution of the Russian Federation accords all citizens the right to use their mother tongue and the freedom to choose which language they use in interaction with each other, bringing up children, education and creative work. Russia likewise grants all of her citizens the right to cherish their mother tongue and to learn and develop them.

Except in Karelia, ethnic languages are enshrined, alongside Russian, as national languages in the constitutions of the republics named for finno-ugrian thnic groups. However, that is not enough to guarantee a national language's legal status in society; there is also a need for separate language laws and explanatory decrees to revive and preserve languages. A language law was enacted in Komi in 1992 and in Mari El in 1995. A language law strengthens the social and legal position of a national tongue and defines opportunities to use it in various spheres of the life of society. In Komi and Udmurtia, programmes to preserve and develop national languages have likewise been approved. These provide for a range of measures to use national languages in such areas as administration, education, science, publishing and mass media.

Narrowing the scope of a national language's use lessens its status in society. That, together with lower standards of teaching, study and development of the language, has led to a situation in which the republics and autonomous areas named for ethnic minorities have felt

obliged to undertake programmes and planning to revive and develop national languages and cultures.

The key question from the perspective of preserving a language is still that of how to get children to speak and study it. Attention must be focused on the responsibility of homes and parents to pass on the language to the next generation. Close co-operation should be created between school and home and the importance of the mother tongue as the language of the home must be emphasised. Support and information about experience gained elsewhere are expected, in particular from Hungary, Estonia and Finland.

7. Native-language schooling

Teaching of mother tongues and of other subjects through their medium is one of the most important questions relating to the future of the cultures of the peoples who speak Uralic languages. This will create a foundation for the development of these languages and for their more widespread use both orally and in writing. Teaching through the medium of their own language will help preserve the Uralic people's most important vector of their national heritage and culture, their mother tongue, and ensure that it is passed on to new generations.

This is done in the ethnic school, that is a place of compulsory education, where the teaching is through the medium of the pupils' mother tongue and the teaching and study material is likewise in that language. An ethnic school plays an important role in caring for a language, strengthening the language's own structures and ensuring that its renewal follows a uniform pattern as it expands its range of expression to embrace the sectors of life inherent in a modern society (e.g. teaching a variety of subjects).

The Finno-Ugrian languages spoken in Russia can nowadays be used as a medium of instruction in at most the four lowest classes in rural schools. As recently as the early 1950s they were used in classes up to the seventh. The most common national school among the Finno-Ugrian peoples is nowadays a Russian school where the native language can be learned as one subject. Some other minority peoples in Russia have had considerably greater success than the Finno-Ugrians in preserving the institutions that support their national culture. For example, the Tatars and the Bashkirs have schools providing all 11 years of compulsory education in their national languages, whilst some Yakut schools provide nine years. It would also be absolutely necessary to try to establish native-language schools also in cities because good teaching in their own mother tongue is a basic right of all children and the foundation for all learning.

Teaching through the medium of national languages and the development of this activity can get off to a good start provided the basic requirements are met: educational material must be drafted, native speakers of the languages in question must be trained as teachers, and the status of minority languages and of instruction through their medium must be improved in schools legislation.

8. Publications and mass media

According to international norms, minority peoples have a right to publications in their own languages. Without state subsidies, however, it has proved very difficult to produce textbooks and fiction in national languages, including the Finno-Ugrian ones.

A language is the most important characteristic of a national culture, uniting and strengthening the nation and the identity of its individual members. Writers' associations and individual writers have in many conjunctions expressed their deep concern at the alarmingly poor situation regarding literature. In particular young writers have virtually no possibility of having their works published. The situation of literature has been deliberated at several international conferences of Finno-Ugrian writers, the most recent of which took place in Estonia in 1996.

Mass media and especially local radio are of major importance as mediators of cultural messages, because they can achieve comprehensive coverage over large areas. Through legislation and development programmes in support of it, it must be ensured that programmes and material in national languages have a place in all media.

9. Conclusion

It is estimated that 5,000 - 6,000 languages are nowadays spoken on our planet. Each reflects a unique view of the world and culture and gives an indication of how each community of speakers articulates its own and the outside world. The death of a language means the disappearance of an irreplaceable part of our knowledge and understanding of people's thinking and adaptation to their environment. In the past 300 years, the rate at which languages are disappearing has accelerated considerably and led to a situation in which about 3,000 spoken languages are classified as endangered.

Since the 1960s, indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities have been actively seeking their rights. The first of the Uralic peoples to do so were the Sámis. Sámi literature and culture has risen to a new level of flourishing in the past three decades even though people in the Nordic countries had been lulled into a resigned belief that the exotic Sámis were a disappearing ethnic group. The era of *perestroika* that began in the Soviet Union in the 1980s also opened up the nationalities debate, and the Uralic peoples have been prompted to ponder their own identities.

Literary languages and the cultural life built on their foundation provide hope for the preservation of the Uralic tongues. The position of the Finnish kindred peoples in Russia has significantly changed as a result of the democratic reforms that began in that country in the present decade. In a multiethnic Russia, the peoples who speak Uralic languages are asking to be able to retain their rights to their own mother tongues and cultures based on them.

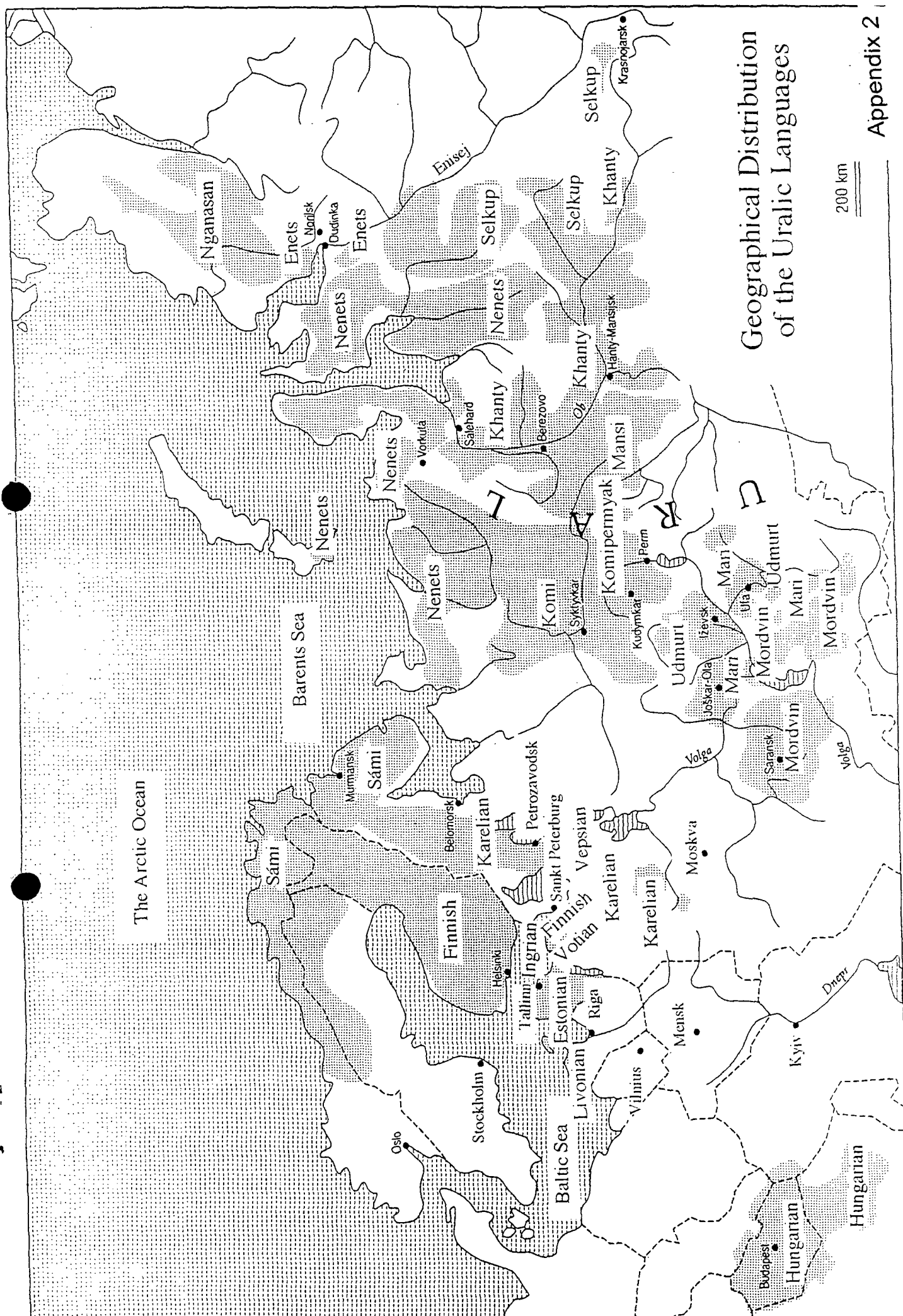
The importance of bi- or multilingualism in preserving minority languages and cultures should be emphasised. Bilingualism should be seen as a wealth, which gives speakers of a minority language the opportunity to learn both their own and the majority language.

The Uralic language family's place on the world map is known and recognised in European scientific circles. The Uralic peoples request that the Assembly and the Council of Europe recognise their right to preserve their mother tongues and cultures. .

Appendix 1

Uralic languages and speakers

	1959	1989	% using national languages
Finnic			
Finnish	5 million speakers		
Karelian	167,278	130,929	47.8
Vepsian	16,374	12,501	50.8
Izhorian	1,062	820	36.8
Votian		60	
Estonian		1.1 million	
Livonian		226	43.8
Sámi languages	50,000 - 80,000		50
Volgaic languages			
Mordvin	1,285,116	1,153,987	67.1
Mari	504,205	670,868	80.8
Permian languages			
Komi-Zyrian	287,027	344,519	70.1
Komi-Permyak	143,901	152,060	70.4
Udmurt	624,794	746,793	69.6
Ugrian languages			
Mansi	6,449	8,474	37.1
Khanty	19,410	22,521	60.5
Hungarian	15 million speakers		
Samoyed languages			
Nenets	23,007	34,665	77.1
Enets		209	45.5
Nganasan	748	1,278	83.2
Selkup	3,768	3,612	47.6
Mator	extinct since 19 th century		
Yurats	“ “ “ “		
Kamas	extinct since 1989		



Appendix 3

Development of the total population and of numbers of Finno-Ugrians and Finno-Ugrian speakers in the Russian Federation 1926-89

