



Scotland - Russia

# REVIEW

*Language issue*

No. 29, June 2013



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## Window to the World

For most native English speakers in the UK, the idea of studying a different language does not make any rational sense. In business - including international - English is often the language of communication, thus knowing another language does not provide any significant advantages on the job market. Every country in the world caters for English speaking tourists too - hotels, restaurants, guides aplenty. Unless you actually want to move to another country for good, there seems to be no reason for studying a second language; there is an assumption that 'everyone speaks English'.

However, it is very narrow and utilitarian view on language to see it as solely the means to communicate information. Learning a language gives a person much more than the ability to talk to native speakers. It provides a unique access to another culture and enables one to appreciate the richness of its literature, poetry, cinema and music to the full. Translations, good as they might be, are only a sneaky peak at the real thing; they might communicate information about the plot, but will always fail to reflect the emotional and cultural aspects of original. Practical reasons aside, knowledge of a foreign language is a window to a more rounded life.

In this sense, the Russian language is a window to a whole new world. Russian culture is very different from the Western tradition; it will give one access to a completely different worldview and values. Russian literature, for example, is impossible to appreciate fully without understanding the unique Russian culture and what is called 'Russian soul' - and it is in the language where this soul lies.

There, however, has been a dramatic decrease in studying foreign languages in the UK, and Slavonic languages in particular. Recently, the Scottish Qualifications Authority decided to abolish the main school exams in Russian, and fewer and fewer universities offer it. Allowing Russian to disappear from UK schools and universities will not only deny the population the access to original culture, but will also hinder relations with an increasingly influential country.

In this issue, we decided to focus on the issue of Russian language in the UK. You will find Jenny Carr, the chairperson of the Scotland-Russia Forum talking of the SRF campaign to return Russian to schools, as well as John Dunn's summary of his report on Slavonic languages in UK universities. Bridget Kendall, BBC foreign correspondent, talks about how Russian helped her career as a reporter, while current students of Russian explain why they chose to study the language. As always, you will also find several reviews of books and films about Russia.

Enjoy!

Varvara Bashkirova  
Editor-in-Chief



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## Scotland-Russia Review

No. 29, June 2013

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# Scotland-Russia Forum

## Chair's report

The Scotland-Russia Forum was founded in 2003 and chairperson **Jenny Carr** has been involved with the organisation since then. She writes about the changes the Forum has undergone through the years and the new challenges it now faces.



It has been a strange few months since we closed the Scotland-Russia Institute in January – few visitors, no exhibitions, very quiet. We have continued to host a few events ourselves though, and the building has been filled most evenings by language classes and other activities – notably the Russian choir and the student Chto Gde Kogda group, both of which are just starting up and were glad to find a congenial place for their meetings. We celebrated Maslennitsa in style with well over 100 visitors, some new to the SRF and some familiar faces. We hope to make that an annual event. The monthly Chai 'n' Chat group continued their lively bilingual conversations while munching cakes and drinking tea. We are actively advertising Russian events all over Scotland, and the format of our website "What's On" section and the e-bulletins has changed to reflect this increased emphasis.

We have also been busy on plans for Year of Russian Culture 2014, working with a number of other organisations. If readers would like to get involved in this please let us know.

At the beginning of June we leave South College Street and move to a small office in the new arts complex at Summerhall ([www.summerhall.co.uk](http://www.summerhall.co.uk)), an exciting new project which we are delighted to be joining. It is centrally located, on the SE corner of the

Meadows, and we look forward to contributing a Russian flavour to their rich menu of arts events. Our library and language classes will move with us – library access details will be published on [www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/library.html](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/library.html) and emailed to all borrowers. Our new address, access arrangements, activities etc will be posted to members as soon as we have settled. For other information on our move please email [info@scotlandrussiaforum.org](mailto:info@scotlandrussiaforum.org) or phone 0784 691 7627.

The theme of this issue of the SRF Review is Russian language teaching. It is essential for Russian to take its place alongside the other major languages in schools and universities. The current position does not reflect the country's political, economic and cultural importance – and its low profile is damaging to understanding, as well as giving a false impression that Russia is somehow not relevant to us.

The recent HEA/BASEES report on Slavonic studies in UK universities (see author John Dunn's article in this issue) shows that demand from both students and employers is relatively buoyant although institutional support is not as strong as it might be. In Scottish schools the picture is different – the abolition of national qualifications in Russian in 2015 will probably lead to the loss of what little

secondary teaching there is. The new 1+2 programme calls for the study of two foreign languages in primary school, to be continued into secondary. This may offer an opportunity for Russian at the primary level at least – so we are trying to raise interest by targeting our taster classes at primary schools, and they have been very well received by both teachers and pupils. The grant from Glasgow City Council for weekly Russian clubs, which resulted from successful tasters in the city last year, has been increased to fund 3 clubs next year and will be administered in future by our partners in this project, the Glasgow-based RCS Haven. We are very grateful to the two teachers for their enthusiasm and dedication. There are clubs in some schools too, evidence of pupil-led interest in Russia and its language. However the tasters and clubs are modest compared to the Chinese-funded, and Scottish Government supported, "Confucius Classrooms" which have brought the timetabled study of Chinese to some 70 Scottish schools. We have requested funding from Russia for just one school project – but so far without success.

Finding funding for this and other projects is a priority for the immediate future. Help with the day to day running of the SRF would be very much appreciated to let me get on with that.

# Russian as a Door Opener

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**Bridget Kendall**, the BBC correspondent, tells *The Review* how knowing Russian helped her to pursue a successful career in international reporting

The best piece of career advice I ever had was when I was trying to decide what to study at university. It was from my father: “Master a hard language and you’ll never regret it,” he said to persuade me to study Russian not English literature.

“Russian will give you an unusual specialist skill which will help ground you, whatever else you decide to do in life. And it will make any prospective employer look twice at you. Your application will stand out and you’ll be the one they call to interview, to take a closer look at you.”

It was really good advice. And I acted on it.

I had been studying Russian since the age of fourteen. At my school it was possible to take up a third language instead of specializing in science. Now I am sorry that I know so little about physics and chemistry, because my

understanding of fascinating subjects like genetics and astrophysics is so rudimentary. But I do not regret for one minute taking up Russian.

Yes, it is a hard language with a funny alphabet (though not as hard as Chinese or Turkish. Russian is at least from the same Indo-European family of languages as English, French and German). But once you have mastered the letters and the sounds they stand for, and once you have climbed the steep slope of declensions and irregular verbs, it is not nearly as difficult as it first appeared.

My first Russian teacher used to say that if you studied the Russian language intensively to begin with (several hours a week), then progress over the first six months would be agonisingly slow. You had to get past the alphabet, past the unpredictable stress pattern, past all those difficult genitive

plural endings, past the weird way Russian tenses work, and verbs of motion. But if you slogged away for six months and got the basics under your belt, then progress would suddenly accelerate. You could start guessing what words meant by their shape. You could work out the rough meaning of a verb by the nature of its prefix and root. You could take a stab at what an adjective might mean by recognizing the noun it came from.

What my father did not add, but is also true, is that once you’ve got to grips with the language, an extraordinary, rich and exhilarating world of literature, poetry, music and theatre opens up to you. And while - like English - the spoken language has changed considerably, the written language has not changed that much. Just as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is still a delightful read, so are Pushkin’s short stories from the beginning of the 19th century. And the big baggy novels of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy actually feel easier and more colloquial to read in Russian than some of the classic translations into English.

“*Russian will give you an unusual specialist skill which will help ground you, whatever you decide to do in life*”

My knowledge of Russian got me on to two highly prized British Council Scholarships to spend two years studying in Russia, on to a prestigious two year post graduate scholarship to Harvard in the USA, and into a wonderful post graduate college in Oxford (St Antony's). And when I finally decided to stop being a Chekhovian 'eternal student' and get a job, I found my knowledge of the language and the country created new opportunities. My tentative applications for BBC training schemes available at the time propelled me onto the short list of two separate schemes and before long I found myself at the BBC World Service, working as a radio reporter and producer in its current affairs department. Certainly, by luck, my timing was excellent. There could not have been a better moment to be a Russian specialist.

In 1985 the Kremlin old guard was replaced by the reformist regime of Mikhail Gorbachev, and before long it became possible to report from inside the Soviet Union on a vibrant changing society. Suddenly there was a thirst for information about what was happening in the once moribund Soviet Union. I found myself in demand at the BBC as a reporter and interviewer who not only spoke good Russian but had actually lived there.

I went to many of the arms control summits during the 1980s to report on the historic encounters between American and Soviet leaders which broke the ice between the once rival superpowers. I began returning to Moscow more and more frequently to keep pace with the dizzying rate of political change there. Within a few years the BBC decided to expand its Moscow Bureau and invited me to go

there as BBC Moscow Correspondent. It was an extraordinary time to be there. I found myself with a front row seat when the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union collapsed and the new Russian state was born. Since then I have been Washington Correspondent for the BBC and now Diplomatic Correspondent. I return to Russia regularly and have used my Russian to interview President Putin twice and President Medvedev. Who could wish for a better career path?

And I had not even intended to become a journalist. My decision to study Russian and maintain it as a specialist interest was what opened all the doors for me.

© *Bridget Kendall*  
*BBC Diplomatic Correspondent,*  
*former BBC Moscow*  
*Correspondent*



## Bridget Kendall

- Based in London; covers top foreign stories for radio and television news.
- Joined the BBC in 1983 as a radio production trainee for BBC World Service and became a correspondent when she moved to Moscow in 1989.
- Has made several documentaries for BBC television including profiles of Vladimir Putin, Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev, as well as a documentary on the rise of Russian nationalism and a profile of Hillary Clinton.
- First woman to win the coveted James Cameron Award for distinguished journalism in 1992 for her reports on events in the former Soviet Union.
- Won a Bronze Sony Radio Award for Reporter of the Year and was made an MBE in the 1994 New Year's Honours list.

*Information taken from [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) ©*

# Well worth the effort

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Students studying Russian in UK universities write about the reasons for their choice.

***Eleanor Davies, 2011 graduate,  
University of Glasgow:***

Picture this. It's just after midnight on a January night cold enough to put frost in your hair. You're walking across the frozen River Volga, slightly nervously, though the car parked on the ice gives a reassuring sense of security. You've just been watching people dip themselves in the river's waters as part of an Epiphany tradition that stretches back centuries. You may or may not have a half-frozen bottle of beer in your hand. This, and many other slightly surreal moments from the year I spent living in Tver (near Moscow), are why I chose to do Russian, although I didn't know that when I picked it as a degree subject at 17 after doing rather a large amount of Russian history for GCSE and A Level.

Among my course-mates we have something of a "chicken or egg" problem: did studying Russian make us the somewhat eccentric, very self-reliant and overwhelmingly curious people that we are, or did that come first? I think it's both. It's true that struggling with the joys of verbs of motion or the fact that there is no real verb for "to have" requires dedication, but it has its rewards. Choosing Russian has not only given me an endless series of "...and that's how we ended up in a Soviet

holiday camp" stories, but also made me fall in love with a complex and fascinating country. This slightly contrary love, which I suspect is partly down to respect for how it manages to keep going, also stems from my Russian literature studies, with their parade of weird and wonderful characters in unlikely situations (I can't recommend Gogol's *Dead Souls* or Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* enough).

Studying the language has, however, given me more than the ability to rank Superfluous Men in order of attractiveness and an unreasonable knowledge of Russian pop. Thanks to my language knowledge I've developed translation skills that have in turn nurtured, through translating materials relating to Russian cases before the European Court of Human Rights, an ambition to work in human rights law. I am currently working in a law firm in Paris that has a large number of Russian-speaking clients and the language and cultural knowledge that I have acquired through studying Russian is proving invaluable. I am sure that it will continue to be so, and would encourage anyone thinking of learning Russian to take the plunge (although maybe not into the Volga in winter!).



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***Marta Wiejak, 2nd year Russian,  
University of Edinburgh:***

As a second year Russian Studies student I have been learning Russian language for two years already. There were several reasons that motivated my choice of subject, stretching from the beauty of the sound of Russian to its usefulness while travelling around the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. The most important of them, however, was my interest in Russian literature, history, current affairs: broadly speaking, in Russian culture, that cannot be understood without the knowledge of the language. It is not only about understanding what was not translated into a language I already know, nor about the mere ability to converse in Russian. Language is much more than just a means of communication. Within its structure there hides the history of its users, their habits and the explanation of their way of thinking; minor details that cannot be directly translated, but that can be understood.

My first language is Polish and I learn Russian from an English-speaker perspective. This puts me in quite a unique

position and enhances my understanding not only of Russian, but also of English and Polish. On the other hand, it does cause some specific problems. The grammars of Polish and Russian are similar in general terms, but differ a lot when it comes to details. Therefore, the process of learning Russian comes down for me to fighting the intuitions and giving different meanings to apparently familiar words. What I struggle with most is the stress and the pronunciation in general. Russian is full of words like *возвращающийся* or *разговаривать* that, when written, look very innocent, soft and nice, but turn out to be almost impossible to pronounce. Learning Russian very often thus becomes for me just a struggle to stress correctly various tongue twisters, but I believe it is well worth the effort.



**Calum Rourke, 1st year Russian and German, University of Cambridge:**

One eye on university league tables, the other on a future career, prospective students have never had to navigate such a rich, and at times overwhelming network of options as the UCAS system. With graduate employment low, and no definite sign of improvement, the emphasis at my Edinburgh secondary school was firmly on courses that would lead to ‘secure’ and ‘established’ career paths.

However, where’s the room amongst this for languages? And indeed – for Russian? My friends and family viewed my decision to study German and Russian as an odd one. I was confronted with a ‘Why study languages when you could study law?’ logic, which I fear characterises the experience of many who opt for more unusual choices. Had there not been the support of some fantastic teachers, and the SRF, my path to university might have been different.

At school, languages are for the majority a nice, but unnecessary extra. A pass at Standard Grade in either French or German was compulsory for me; at many secondaries this is not the case, and our increasingly monolingual classrooms have led to an 11.2% drop in applications for European languages at university. (Although there was an overall 7% decline in university applications in general for the 2011-12 cycle, this statistic is still worrying; for non-European languages, the decrease was even greater, at 21.5%.) With heavy criticism of the SNP’s ‘1+2’ policy in the media, one can’t help but wonder whether the state provision of foreign languages is condemned to wither, losing out to a skewed rhetoric of ‘science and business first.’

I say skewed because this rhetoric is intrinsically flawed. Phrases like ‘export-led recovery’ are bandied about at Holyrood with, at least to a linguist, no ground beneath them. The Scottish government’s own investigative unit, the Languages Working Group, has reported that our linguistic

deficiency costs the Scottish economy at least £500 million a year. How can we build bridges when we lack the raw materials necessary? Bridges to countries like Russia, Britain’s fourth fastest growing export market, according to UK Trade and Investment.

This brings me to Russian studies more specifically, and to a wider issue, that languages are unfairly overlooked in terms of their economic importance. By their very nature, those who study languages are ‘people’ people. The skill of speaking a language to a high degree of fluency is one long-prized by employers. Yet political rhetoric ignores this, instead enshrining science as the key to successful international partnerships. Certainly, we need innovators, but someone has to do the talking.

Citing the deficiencies of language policy in this country can be endless, but this is not what I hope to put across. Studying a language like Russian at university is more than just a stepladder to a business career – it’s a sad fact that we first frame it in this light. Studying languages is, idealism aside, a broadening of one’s horizons, in the most literal sense there is. Studying Russian brings to this a challenge to those horizons. It is a fascinating country, a ‘half-known.’ Its recent history is infamous, and its leading voices – Dostoevskii, Tolstoi, Chekhov – are responsible for some of the greatest literature ever written. The exploration of these voices in their original form – something I’ve only just begun – is enriching beyond words.

Yet the average person knows so little about them. With Russia’s increasing political and economic importance, acquisition of such in-depth cultural knowledge is an asset. To quote Solzhenitsyn: “знай языки, знай стороны, знай людей.” A three step-process. To new ideas, to prosperity...? If only the Scottish government would listen to the imperative.

# Scotland in Russia

**Anton Griznenko** has been studying the XIX century Scottish missionaries and colonists in North Caucasus for many years. The Review has published his research since 2006 (issues 14, 18, 19 and 21). In this instalment he writes about exciting findings and future expedition plans.



*Dr Alexandr Paterson (II or III)*

**Alexander** Paterson (I), co-founder of the Scottish Colony at Karass (now Inozemstvo), decided to stay and build on his life in North Caucasus. Information dotted across sources now sheds more light on the lives of his son Dr Alexander Paterson (II) and grandson Dr Alexander Paterson (III), or as each of them known in Russia, Doctor of Medicine Alexandr Alexandrovich Paterson.

Dr Alexander Paterson (II) is born in Karass 16 September 1812. First educated in Astrakhan he then qualifies as a doctor at Moscow's Imperial Medical-Surgical Academy in 1833. First service is with Russia's 8th, 15th Naval Units and next at the Naval Hospital in Kronstadt but resigns in 1839 at his own request.

In Pyatigorsk - one of the four Caucasus region health resorts - he

starts a 32-year private practice. Karass nearby remains dear to him with the father's house, land and family graves, including his daughter 'Elezabeth' (dies in 1842 aged two).

Service record reveals: Pyatigorsk Military Hospital Junior Doctor (1841-44), Senior Doctor (1844-52), Head Doctor at a Military Hospital (1849) and of Don Cossack Host Hospital's leprosy ward. By 1849 awarded Grade 8 in Imperial Russia honours system with privileges of hereditary nobility and promoted to Court Counsellor in 1851. Resigns from military service in 1852.

By 1863 he rents out rooms; hotels fail to cope during the annual May-September season. From the same year leads the largest section of the region's Medical Committee. Serves with distinction and becomes a highly respected public and medical figure. Ever so obliging holds more surgeries in 1866 in response to the region's needs.

Development of medical science is constantly on his mind. We find him among founders of Russia's first Balneological Society (RBS) created in Pyatigorsk in June 1863 - exactly 150 years ago - and becomes Vice-President, Treasurer and Audit Committee member. His medical observations and inquisitive mind are a treasure trove for the Society. They lead to a detailed study of

Kislovodsk natural thermal waters. In 1865-66 he presents observations on various infections, Essentuki thermal springs and on cases of rheumatism. A happy event occurs in 1865 with the arrival of his son Dr Alexander Paterson (III); his father and grandfather are now known as 'Paterson Senior' and 'Paterson Junior'.

In 1865 Dr Paterson (II) admitted negative results from treating leprosy with various ointments; he stands his corner in 1867 speaking strongly against use of mercuric substances and sulphur baths in some conditions. In this respect his son produces his own updated results on use of various thermal springs in gastric cases.

Regrettably, his father develops a heart problem, but continues to chair RBS meetings despite resigning from the regional administration. Eventually he requests to relieve him of Vice-Presidency due to health reasons, yet remains as its Treasurer.

*Paterson family graves in Karass*



In 1872 he is still seen debating on broadening use of baths in Essentuki; he takes special care to ensure that poor patients receive tickets from the regional administration. Unfortunately, the heart problem leads to a rapid decline of health and he dies on 6 August 1873. The funeral is a modest affair; a wish he had repeatedly expressed. Head of the region's administration expresses the general feeling of the great loss of a successful doctor and of 'a good-natured, honest and honourable person.' At a special RBS meeting its President stresses Dr Paterson's (II) devotion to science and his exceptional talent of practical observation. Renowned as one of the first practicing doctors he greatly contributed to the development of the spas.

Fortunately, his son Dr Alexander Paterson (III) upholds his father's reputation by serving at Pyatigorsk Military Hospital and running a private

practice. He is also a fellow of the Imperial Caucasus Medical Society and of the RBS in his own right as Secretary, Treasurer and Librarian. The RBS President expressed special gratitude for his services on a number of occasions; repeatedly, he got re-elected to his positions. Examples of his active service are numerous; one of them is a convincing 8-pages report on Essentuki Thermal Waters (1873-74). We also see him documenting treatments for various disorders and on temperature discrepancies in hot springs. The problem of fresh water supply is resolved with a comparison to the river Thames in London's 1854 cholera outbreak. Skilled in dealing with heated debates and unjustified complaints he presents carefully researched findings in 1874 on the composition of 'Iron Waters'. Unexpectedly, after presenting the annual report in May 1876, he thanks the RBS for the trust put in him but 'due to

domestic circumstances' he requests not to be elected to positions.

In retirement Dr Alexander Paterson (III) continues private practice at home '8am to 10am and from 5pm'. He also acts as a doctor at the Pyatigorsk gymnasium (1876-1880) and in 1878 is promoted to Grade 6 of Russia's 8-grade honours system. He is believed to have died on September 25, 1879; he was neither listed as a practicing doctor nor as a RBS fellow.

Overall, in no small way it is the dedication of the two Dr Alexander Patersons that enables the RBS in 1876 to maintain scientific contacts with 90 institutions, universities and journals, and have over 70 fellows from Pyatigorsk to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Germany and France. Ultimately, it grows into a Research Institute.

Research into the Scottish Colony at Karass continues.

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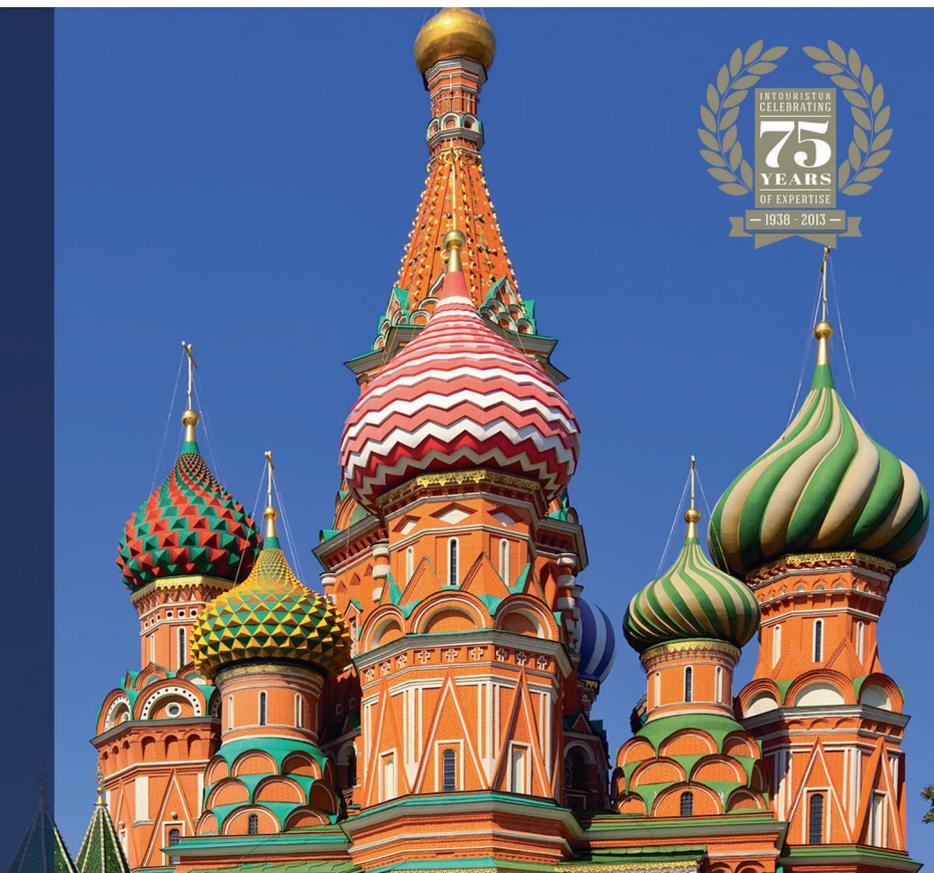
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# Russian Art Week

**Russian Art Week** is a bi-annual London event which was founded in 2012 by **Theodora Clarke**, editor of *Russian Art and Culture* magazine. The major auction houses in London of Christie's, Sotheby's, Bonhams and MacDougall's all join together to present a series of Russian sales in London, and numerous topical exhibitions and events are held in museums and galleries around the city.

**Russian** art market in the UK really took off in the 2000s. Since then, the top lots in London auction houses have been selling for millions of pounds, the recent sell highlights including works by Shishkin, Roerich, Repin, Aivazovsky, Kandinsky and Chagall among others. The four major London auction houses (Bonhams, Christie's, Sotheby's and MacDougall's) traditionally held a week of Russian sales bi-annually for a number of years. However, it came to Theodora Clarke's attention that there was no central source of information to find out what was going on. Her project aims to collate the information (sales times, venues and highlights) from the auction houses and present it on one accessible platform.

Russianartweek.co.uk and the accompanying guide are the main sources for this information, publishing all the sales times and highlights as well as any related or coinciding cultural events. The aim is to promote Russian culture in Britain and turn the week into a major event in the art world calendar - the sales will still form the key events of the week but they will be accompanied by a array of cultural accompaniments in the form of exhibitions, performances and lectures. This June, for example, Russian Art and Culture not only publicised related events, but also has begun to organise its own events including a day trip to Houghton Hall, a private view of the current

V&A exhibition and the Contemporary Key tour. The project proved to be a huge success; in November 2012, sales came up to £40 million, with the highest selling female artist remaining Natalia Goncharova, whose works were sold for more than £10 million.

This June, launch of the Week was marked by the the panel discussion taking place in the Erarta Gallery. It featured Dr Jilleen Nadolny, an expert in technical art history, from Art Access and Research ([artaccessresearch.com](http://artaccessresearch.com)), James Butterwick, a dealer and expert in Russian art ([jamesbutterwick.com](http://jamesbutterwick.com)) and Alice Farren-Bradley, a recoveries case manager at the Art Loss Register. The talks focused around the issue of fakes and forgeries of Russian Art, especially at auction. Dr Jilleen focused on the case of a Kustodiev painting, which was thought to be fake but which she proved to be in fact real with the help of scientific evidence. Alice Farren-Bradley gave an overview of the aims and purpose of the Art Loss Register and showed a number of works that are believed to be stolen or fake. James Butterwick finished the evening with a discussion focusing on Natalia Goncharova and the problem of forgeries of her work in publications and at auction.

A wide variety of works was presented for sale this year, from Faberge and icons, to the 18th-19th century landscape and history paintings, avant-garde and works of contemporary Russian artists. The outcomes of this year's sales can be found at [www.russianartandculture.com](http://www.russianartandculture.com) and [www.russianartweek.co.uk](http://www.russianartweek.co.uk).



James Butterwick on Natalia Goncharova



# Case on Slavic Languages

At the beginning of 2013, **John Dunn** presented an extensive report on the current state of Slavic languages in UK universities. He gives a brief summary of the report, highlighting the major points of interest.

The report into the present state of Slavonic and East European Studies in the higher education system of the United Kingdom that I presented earlier this year to the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies and the Higher Education Academy presents a mixed picture as far as Scotland is concerned. In the field of Area Studies the Centre for Russian, Central and East European Studies, a consortium based in Glasgow and including four other Scottish universities, has been a conspicuous success and provides a template for the development of the discipline. The picture for Russian Language and Cultural Studies, however, is much less rosy, and the subject is now confined to just three universities: Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews. Student numbers in all three institutions are buoyant, but the staffing position is unsatisfactory: none of the departments has a professor in post (though St Andrews is planning to appoint a Professor of Russian in the near future), and while Russian is not at present under threat in any of these universities, the staffing position at Edinburgh and Glasgow is not conducive to long-term sustainability.

There are several reasons for this state of affairs, including a tendency to regard Modern Languages as a whole as having low priority and little esteem and the virtual elimination of Russian teaching in Scottish state schools and loss of the Higher examination in Russian. There are welcome signs that attitudes to Modern Languages are starting to change, but it will take time for this change to be felt in the universities. In the meantime there will, I suspect, be a need for (yet another!) sustained and co-ordinated campaign to promote the case for Russian; the more stakeholders (politicians, potential employers) that can be involved, the better. At the same time it would be good to see more co-operation between the remaining departments, perhaps leading to a Scottish Consortium for Slavonic and East European Studies. The aim should be to place the subject on a sustainable footing by, for example, refilling posts that have become vacant in recent years.

The other good news in the report concerns careers. Russian continues to be a language that is in demand

among employers; it is the language of an important world, European and regional power and continues to serve as a lingua franca throughout much of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the independent countries of the former Soviet Union. It is a language that provides easy access to a dozen closely related languages, six of which are or soon will be official languages of the EU. This means that there are numerous opportunities for graduates in Russian in all the main sectors of the economy, including business (not only oil and gas), journalism, teaching English, translation and volunteering, all of which offers plenty of scope for working both in Russia and with Russia.

*The report was published by the Higher Education Academy ([www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk)) and can be found online at [www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/resources/Review\\_into\\_the\\_present\\_state\\_of\\_Slavonic\\_Studies.pdf](http://www.scotlandrussiaforum.org/resources/Review_into_the_present_state_of_Slavonic_Studies.pdf)*

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# films

Reviews by Marc David Jacobs

## The Stoker (Кочегар, 2010)

Once Upon a Time in Yeltsin's  
Russia

There is a thread running through the past forty-five years of cinema consisting of films whose titles begin *Once Upon a Time in...*. Inaugurated by Sergio Leone, the true inheritors of his masterpieces - differentiated from dozens of pretenders now attempting to co-opt their successes - are films which manage to treat a number of simultaneous particular subjects: the unhealed scars of past injustices, the difficult and/or lonely existence of an outsider figure, the ambiguous virtues of crime and criminality and, as the geographical nature of these titles would suggest, the amorphous and shifting nature of national identities.

It would therefore have been with good reason had Aleksey Balabanov decided to title his 13th film *Once Upon a Time in Russia* rather than *The Stoker*, as arguably the only ingredient it lacks is the epic sweep which other *Once Upon a Time...* films often (re)appropriate. *The Stoker* is, by comparison, a chamber piece, but its concerns are otherwise nearly

identical, particularly regarding questions of national identity. Made in 2010, it is almost overwhelmingly imbued with the lawless, grasping post-Soviet spirit of mid-1990s Russia; indeed, so emphatically Russian is the film that the singular song with which Balabanov chooses to pervade it, underscoring conversations, long silent tracking shots and violence alike with its flamenco-influenced pop rhythms, is entitled *Russkaya* - 'Russian'.

The uses of this song, as with all things in *The Stoker*, are custom-tailored to suit the film's concerns; its story is therefore a straightforward one, simple enough to serve its intention of depicting the era in which it is set to as accurate a degree as possible. Its protagonist is the eponymous stoker, Major Skryabin, a shellshocked Yakut who served in Afghanistan and now lives in north-west Russia, here a witness to rampant, unpunished crime and the aftermath of crime, remaining either oblivious or apathetic to the consequences. Into and out of his life come several figures, all transient, equally unconcerned with him as he seems to be with them until matters

inexorably force him out of his semi-catatonic torpor. However, this engagement is predictably momentary, and he appears unable to cope with anything apart from keeping things ticking over, turning over his fires and keeping people warm.

Similarly, all the film's characters seem concerned only with continuing as they've started, whether they've embarked on a life of stitching furs or murdering strangers. Everything in Yeltsin's Russia has been rendered perfunctory: sex, death, even childhood, which passes through the film in the form of two children who befriend Skryabin so they can sit and watch the fires he tends. For Skryabin's own daughter, a financial transaction suffices for a family meeting. Everyone's lives are so rigourously concerned with procedure that our most intimate moments with them are inevitably spent travelling; by foot or by bus, they encounter other people, jostle with them, are even briefly caught by them, but more often simply brush (or, more accurately, scrape) past them, neither pausing on their paths even momentarily. The entirety of each person's life here seems to be represented as one prolonged journey to point B.

Skryabin, however, apparently unlike any of his countrymen, is granted a single personal, creative dimension: he is, throughout the film, engaged in the prolonged composition of a story set in the quasi-mythic past of his Siberian homeland, a task which provides us with the faintest glimmer of paradise from his Russian inferno. At one point, this story - which may also serve as an embodiment of the entire film in embryo - is read aloud. And you find, as you listen to it, that it suddenly becomes impossible to believe that its narration did not begin 'Once upon a time, in Yakutia...'.  
(Just before going to print, news was received of the death of director Aleksey Balabanov at the age of 54, a major loss to Russian cinema of



perhaps its most unapologetically controversial director and cinematic social critic. *The Stoker* was Balabanov's penultimate film, followed by 2012's *Me Too*).

*The Stoker* is the first film being released and distributed throughout the UK by Edinburgh's Filmhouse, and it will be seen here and in selected venues from Friday 17th May. See <http://www.facebook.com/TheStokerFilm> for details.

## The Interrogation (Kuulustelu, 2009)

Writer and film director Jörn Donner has recently been quoted as saying that the fall of the Soviet Union has been the more important event in his lifetime; indeed, though never having lived in Russia for any significant amount of time, he has many connections to the country both through his work and his illustrious ancestry. Most notably, his father, the influential ethnographer and anthropologist Kai Donner, set out from 1911 to 1913 on an expedition to study the habits of the Samoyed people, which resulted in his landmark study *Among the Samoyed in Siberia* (1915). The younger (albeit septuagenarian) Donner recently set out to retrace his father's Siberian journeys, resulting in his book and television documentary both entitled *In My Father's Footsteps* (both 2006).

Donner's most recent feature film, *The Interrogation*, also touches on Russian matters, specifically the aftermath of the discovery in Finland of a Soviet spy of Finnish ancestry during the Second World War. Adapted by Olli Soinio from his own play, the film remains very true to its theatrical origins, although Donner claims that its highly-praised minimalist qualities were due solely to a lack of funding - which also meant that the film was shot in only eleven days, and edited in thirteen.

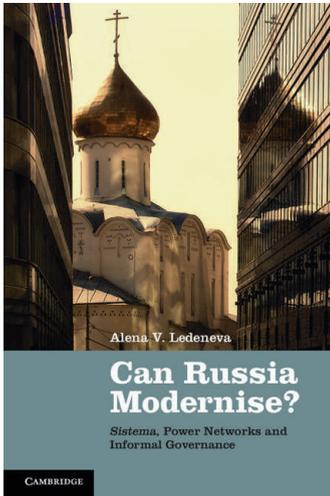
The film's subject is the real-life figure Kerttu Nuorteva (1912-1963), daughter of the former president of the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, who was captured in 1942 after accidentally leaving her radio transmitter to be discovered at a laundry. Rather than being subjected to a straightforward attempt to break her down into revealing details of the Soviet spy network to which she was connected, Nuorteva's captors opted for less brutal methods of extracting information from her, convincing rather than cudgeling, and attempting to prove to her that she had been sent to Finland not to gather information but, rather, as an expedient way of ridding the Soviet Union of an unwanted Finn: Nuorteva, who had been languishing in a gulag at the start of the War, was sent to Finland at a time when Soviet spies were often executed either immediately upon discovery or after summary interrogation by the Gestapo.

The result is a spy story with very few easy parallels. In one



of the film's central scenes, Nuorteva is escorted to a posh restaurant and allowed to speak at length to a former close ally of her father's, who converted from his former Stalinist fervour after witnessing firsthand the purges of the 1930s; her ostensible minder sits across the room, patiently reading his newspaper as she finishes her dinner and conversation. Later, she is wooed over a private candlelit dinner with her interrogator, who, in his solicitous attempts to gain her cooperation, we could easily mistake for proposing to her. The film thereby becomes, rather than a simple procedural, documenting the extraction of information (à la *Zero Dark Thirty*), more a set of detailed and patient psychological character studies both of the captive and her captors, whose humane good intentions do not necessarily yield humane results.

As is often the case in such minimalist cinema - Donner's camera rarely if ever moves, and many scenes are completed in a single take - *The Interrogation* is greatly carried on the shoulders of its actors. Minna Haapkylä won a much-deserved Jussi (the Finnish national film award) for her portrayal of Nuorteva, whom she leads with unerring accuracy down a painstakingly-crafted path from steadfast loyalty through growing disillusionment and finally to resignation and bitterness at her mistreatment by both her Soviet masters and her Finnish interrogators. Donner - once tipped to become one of the world's leading directors - has produced few works for the cinema since his promising heyday in the late 1960s and early 1970s; *The Interrogation*, praised by some as perhaps his greatest film, proves that he was not altogether undeserving of his early recognition.



## Can Russia modernise?

Alena V. Ledeneva

Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013 314pp. PB £19.99

Alena Ledeneva is a Russian sociologist who has spent

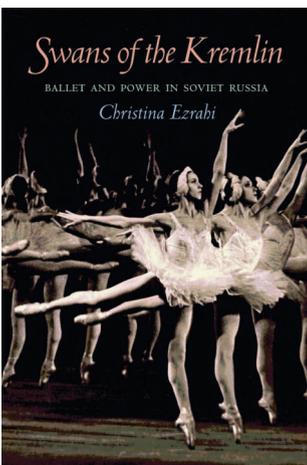
most of her professional career at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at UCL. She established her reputation with a splendid book on blat (*Russia's Economy of Favours*, 1998) and extended it with a study of *How Russia Really Works* in 2006. This is a sequel (or as we are told later on, not quite a sequel); it deals with what she calls sistema, or in other words the informal networks that underpin the conduct of government. This is a rich and stimulating account that is full of insights and ethnographic detail; but it is not, perhaps, an entirely convincing one.

The most important single source is a series of interviews with insiders themselves. There were 42 of these interviews, all of them anonymous, conducted in the 'two capitals', London or Paris. They excluded vocal critics of the system, and also "those whose position in sistema [made] them too vulnerable".

The interviews appear to have been tape-recorded; at any rate they are quoted directly and at some length. It is, of course, rather frustrating to have no independent access to these interviews, nor any idea how the respondents were distributed by age, occupation, nationality or gender (which would have been perfectly compatible with anonymity). All the same, the account they offer is certainly a plausible one: of an environment in which "relationships matter more than rules", and in which the "provision and sharing of informal income" is a crucial means of ensuring loyalty.

This is a study that works well chapter by chapter; it is perhaps less satisfactory as a single book. The subject itself is often elusive – is it 'perceptions of power', or the 'material culture' (to which is dedicated a whole chapter) of the ruling group? Why do we have another chapter about 'telephone justice', and so much about the Berezovsky-Abramovich court case? The central focus of the book should presumably be the interpersonal associations that underpin the Putin administration; but this is not, as such, the author's primary concern, and what we are offered in this connection comes mostly from other scholars and the *New Times*. Is 'network-based governance', in any case, so particularly Russian? Few will fail to gain something of value from this important study; but in the end, I felt an opportunity had been missed.

Reviewed by Stephen White  
James Bryce Professor of Politics  
University of Glasgow



## Swans of the Kremlin

Christina Ezrahi

University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012. 368pp. PB £19.99

This has been a turbulent year in the world of Russian ballet, with the Bolshoi scandal that began with the near blinding of director Sergei Filin only

deepening as time goes on. As articles continuously emerge seeking to expose the murky connections between high art and political intrigue in Russia, Christina Ezrahi's detailed study of the politics of dance in the Soviet Union provides an

interesting historical counterbalance. *Swans of the Kremlin* is the result of meticulous archival research, addressing through historical context the question of how classical dance – arguably an inherently bourgeois art form – could not only survive the 1917 Revolution but also come to be used as a powerful organ of the state. Such an analysis of ballet is long overdue: there are no comparable studies of the potent links between art and politics with regard to the Soviet example.

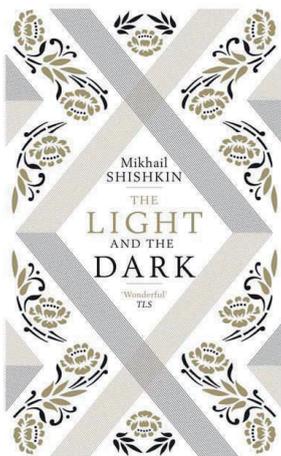
Ezrahi's attention to historical detail is commendable. The opening sections – focusing on the October Revolution and its immediate aftermath – are slightly weak in their heavily descriptive analysis of the period, but as she moves into the 1950s and height of the Cold War, Ezrahi's narrative comes into its own. Unfortunately, the book ends rather abruptly with the close of the 1960s, and, unusually, there is no discussion of the issue of defection in any detail; indeed, notably missing

from her study is the case of Rudolf Nureyev, whose high-profile escape to the West in 1961 does not even merit a footnote here. Ezrahi's work would benefit from a structural change, dividing analyses of the Bolshoi and Kirov into separate sections, as they are quite radically different institutions with their own individual histories. Nonetheless, her combination of anecdotal accounts and historical evidence result in a very readable, academically sound analysis of the thorny relationship between Russia's two major ballet companies and the Kremlin.

While Ezrahi's work might at first glance appear to be

specifically directed at dance enthusiasts, it may well be ballet fans who find themselves disappointed by this book, so focused is it upon political history rather than artistry. Yet this is the primary strength of Ezrahi's research; rather than adding another ballet anthology to the canon of dance literature, the writer puts forward some challenging issues for researchers in performance studies to address, laying open the page for the next researcher to challenge contemporary goings-on in the shadowy world of post-Soviet Russian ballet.

*Reviewed by Dr Lucy Weir*



## The Light and The Dark

Mikhail Shishkin

Translated by Andrew Bromfield.  
Quercus, London, 2013.  
HB £16.99

Expectations may be very false friends. I awaited the arrival of this work by prominent Russian writer Mikhail Shishkin (born 18th January 1961) literally with delight. Shishkin, who, since 1995, spends his time in Moscow, Switzerland and Germany has an impressive list of publications and literary awards and is regarded by many as a modern-day “Chekhov and Nabokov”. The item under review is elegantly produced and bears the single word on the front cover under the title “Wonderful”, a quote from TLS. The Russian original was published in 2010 and is called *Письмовник*. Before opening the text itself there are a series of one-line descriptions on the inside cover which indeed lead the reader to expect the unexpected: “Fate sends two star-crossed lovers, Sasha and Volodenka, on two separate journeys”, “Two separate journeys across space and time”, “He helps her to come to terms with life”. “And she helps him to come to terms with death”. We are additionally informed that the work we are about to read is, in fact, “...a literary feat as balanced and beautiful as it is prodigious and profound”. The choice of the English title seems to be explained by the quotation on the back cover “Your warmth has become my light in the darkness”. Having been thus prepared to encounter an extraordinary work – my own expectations had led me to predict something between Bulgakov's *Мастер и Маргарита* and, curiously, *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, the reality of this work is much more rooted in a gritty and bleak blackness with images which are often harrowing and challenging, although it does have its moments sublime which are uplifting and stay in the memory.

There are especially beautifully written passages about childhood and insights into the imagination of children:

And I played a game that the rash on my stomach was a constellation and my belly button was the moon. Many years later I saw that was the way the ancient Egyptians used to represent the sky goddess, Nut, who had obviously come down with my starry chickenpox.

This is a work that demands time and concentration; although the love letters between Sasha and Volodenka “...despite their cosmic schism” form the “spine”, so to speak, each fragment or extract almost seems to be a self-standing small prose work and these flow into each other with a grace and ease. The imagery very frequently combines the sublime and the shocking:

You often remembered how one day, when you felt you just couldn't go on, you closed your eyes and suddenly felt happy. That was probably the way happiness had to be, momentary, like the prick of a needle: the child is whining, the oilcloth smells of urine, there's no money...they're broadcasting an earthquake on the radio, there's a war somewhere, and all of this together is happiness.

This is a work that is certainly different and may well upturn the expectations of the reader; but it is worth making the effort to enter into this strange universe which both attracts and repels at the same time but which without doubt draws one into its “magic”. The quality of the translation cannot be faulted. It flows with the unusual rhythms of the text and there would appear to be no jarring moments. It may be good when expectations are upturned and make room for a work which will surely stand the test of time and become a classic of 21st century Russian literature. This is highly recommended to all those who love Russian literature!

*Reviewed by Margaret Tejerizo*  
*University of Glasgow*

# Mumiy Troll: Russian in a Kilt

The popularity of the Russian band *Mumiy Troll* in the West has been growing since the release of *Vladivostok*, which features songs in English. This year the band went on the worldwide tour, performing in Scotland for the first time.

**Vitaliy Artamonov** presents the band and talks about their future plans.



© Photo by Anastasia Rogoziansky

On Thursday, May 23, a concert of a popular Russian band Mumiy Troll took place in Glasgow for the first time. It was taking place on Thursday, making it hard for those living outside Glasgow to attend; despite this, almost 500 people filled up the O2 concert hall.

At the moment, Mumiy Troll is in the middle of its world tour. They arrived to Glasgow from Los Angeles after several concerts held in the USA and China; their next destination is London, followed by Estonia, Ukraine, Georgia and, finally, grand finale in Moscow in the end of June. They performed their old, well known hits (*Vladivostok 2000*, *Medveditsa* etc.) alongside with new ones, currently holding the top positions in Russian radio charts (e.g. *Shark and Spider*). Mumiy Troll wrote the majority of their new songs in two versions - English and Russian - and the singer Ilya Lagutenko alternated language, singing some verses in English and some - in Russian. Both variations were supported by the loving crowd.

Mumiy Troll are now working on a new album, which is to be released in the end of this year. The presentation is to be in Vladivostok, their native city.

Vitaliy Artamonov got a chance to ask the leader of the band, Ilya Lagutenko, some questions about his visit to Scotland (Translated from Russian).

**Vitaliy Artamonov (V.A.):** Is this your first visit to Scotland?

**Ilya Lagutenko (I.L.):** Of course not! We love Scotland, and visit it frequently as tourists when in the UK. However it is the first time we got to perform here.

**V.A.:** Do you feel like a pioneer then?

**I.L. (smiling, turning to the drummer):** How are you feeling, like a pioneer? (both smiling) Well, we got an invitation and were very happy to come, that is all.

**V.A.:** In your music video to the popular song 'Trolleybus No. 4' you are walking along the streets of your native Vladivostok in a Scottish kilt, in the middle of winter. I wonder if you knew that kilt is supposed to be worn without any underwear; you must have been freezing!

**I.L. (laughing):** No, I didn't know that; I will take it into account for future!



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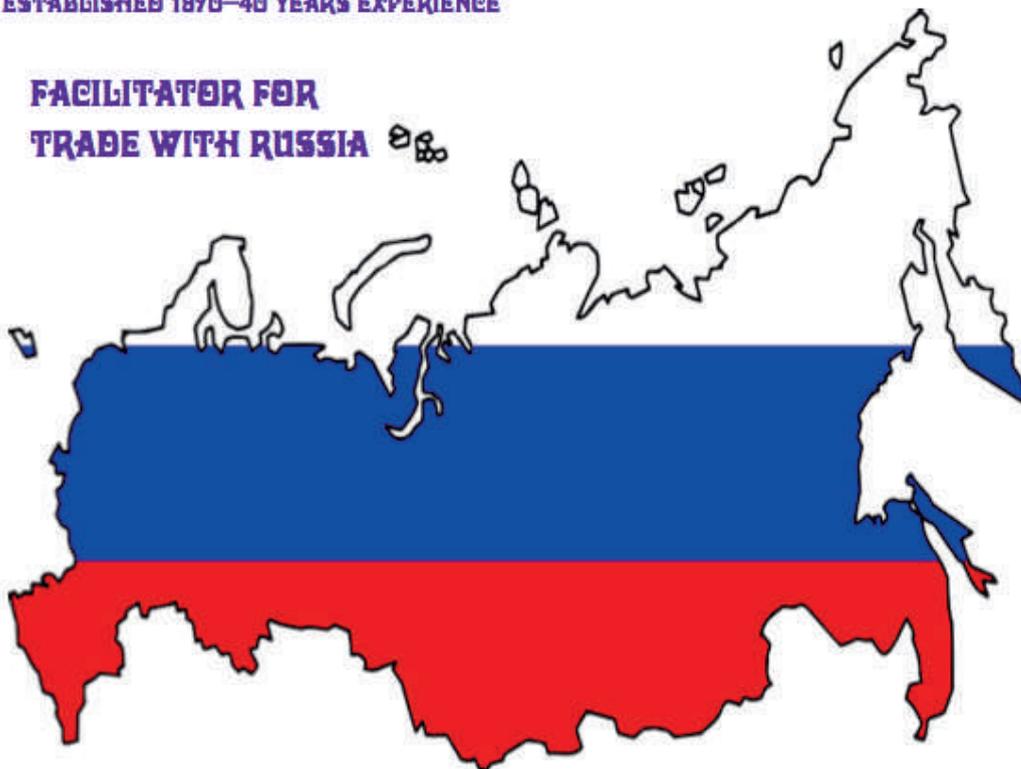


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