

# Including Indigenous Culture and Language in Higher Education: The Case of the Komi Republic

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## Introduction

The demise of the socialist systems of Central and Eastern Europe, initiated by a popular rejection of centralized-command regimes that had failed to deliver social and economic prosperity, also unleashed repressed patriotic and nationalistic emotions that resonated across the region, and particularly in the former regional hegemon, the Soviet Union. Eventually, the USSR could not escape the fate of its neighbors and this first 'experiment with socialism' also collapsed. Much of the centrifugal pressure within the Soviet state can be linked to ethnic unrest in the fourteen peripheral non-Russian union republics (*Sovetskiye Sotsialisticheskiye Respubliki* - SSRs), where dissatisfaction with a highly centralized system which left local people marginalized with little control over their own affairs, in combination with the collapsing economy, produced nationalist political movements that espoused separatist platforms. Perhaps surprisingly, these nationalist sentiments were found even in segments of the republican communist elites, previously considered reliable upholders of the Soviet *status quo*, as part of their demand for increased powers from the centre.

These same pressures were, to a lesser degree, being mirrored in the non-Russian autonomous republics (*Avtonomniye Sovetskiye Sotsialisticheskiye Respubliki* - ASSRs) of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic and after 1992, the residual Russian state was reborn as a federation of more than 150 nationalities. For many of the nationalities who have territorial recognition in the form of 'national' republics and regions, the new opportunity exists to replace the old-style communist-trained elites, who were seen as having had traded in their ethnic heritage for a Soviet-Russian culture, with a new generation. This has been the case in the Komi Republic of north-eastern European Russia. Within ethnic Komi and government circles in the regional capital Syktyvkar, it has been widely acknowledged that one of the greatest obstacles to achieving genuine equality for Komi in the republic is the

wide-spread ignorance of indigenous Komi culture, and especially the lack of bilingual officials and teachers. This has been coupled with a rising ethnic awareness among the Komi, as indeed among the Russians themselves as part of this general ethnic and cultural revival, which recognizes the need to augment their claimed and newly-found status as an equal nation within the federation through the building of an indigenous Komi elite. Against this background, I would like to outline how the Komi have begun to redress, through a new teaching curriculum that is part of a new Finno-Ugrian Faculty (henceforth FUF), an imbalance within general higher education which was neglecting this indigenous Komi element.

### **Why Pressure for Change?**

The key to establishing modern Komi identity has always been language—the very availability of native language education under the Soviets within the autonomous republics played a major role in creating or reinforcing this ethnic and cultural self-identity (Smith 1997). The link between language and identity is not particular to the Komi, and in many cases indigenous culture and traditional knowledge has been reduced to a knowledge of the language. As Schöpflin observes, across the former Eastern Bloc language was universally considered the essence of culture and ethnicity: “Because they spoke the language, they could be deemed a cultural community with moral worth ... language has acquired a very special quality as symbolic of the moral right to exist” (1996: 8). This has not happened spontaneously, but was initiated and nurtured by the underlying precept of Soviet nationality policy, as formulated by Stalin in the early years of this century. Stalin stressed that nations possessed a number of characteristics, including a stable language, without which they ceased to exist. It is not surprising that language is one of the most pressing issues facing the minorities of Russia today as the legacy of this Soviet past continues in the current Russian primordialist approach to ethnicity, where language is emphasized as though embedded in the essence of ethnic group (Shnirelman 1996). While it cannot be claimed that this is the only factor, this attitude to language and ethnicity is commonplace among the Komi—fluency in the language equals genuine ‘Komi-ness’.

While the range of concerns faced by the Komi are not unique in the post-Soviet ethno-republics of Russia, the language situation among the Komi of their republic gives great cause for alarm. While overall, the language is considered to be ‘native’ by approximately 70 per cent of the Komi, this in comparison with the other peoples of the former Soviet Union shows that the Komi language fares very poorly [Table 1]. Here Kaiser has combined and averaged native language use among the titular ethnic units of the Soviet Union (excluding the RSFSR itself) for basic comparisons. While over 90 per cent of the minorities of the combined ethnic units retained their native languages as their first language throughout a 30 year period (1959–1989), native language retention among Komi within the republic dropped from 93.8 per cent to less than 75 per cent over the same time period. So while native language retention in the autonomous republics dropped by only 4.1 per cent and in the union republics by only 1.6 per cent, the use of Komi among the Komi decreased by 19.4 per cent.

TABLE 1: Non-Russian language retention within the ethnic units of the USSR 1959–1989 (in per cent)

	1959	1970	1979	1989	% point change
Komi ASSR	93.8	86.7	80.0	74.4	-19.4
all ASSRs	95.4	94.5	92.9	91.3	-4.1
all SSRs	98.2	97.9	97.1	96.6	-1.6

(Source: Kaiser, 1994: 274–275)

This decrease in Komi as the native language suggests that more and more Komi were adopting the Russian language as their mother tongue, something clearly demonstrated in Table 2, and which examines urban and rural language use individually. Over the same 30 year time period, 41.8 per cent of urban Komi of the Komi ASSR claimed Russian as their native tongue, while the rural figure was 11.4 per cent. The figures for the combined ASSRs and SSRs respectively were 3.9 and 0.9 per cent for non-Russian urban dwellers, and 2.4 and 0.3 per cent for rural dwellers. The discrepancy between the Komi figures and the rest of the non-Russians of the Soviet autonomous

units is startling, especially for urban inhabitants. If one considers that Komi has not been taught in urban schools since the 1960s, one must conclude that most Komi who do consider Komi as their mother tongue are 30 years or older, an ill omen for continued Komi language use in the cities among future generations.

TABLE 2: The increase of Russian as a native language for non-Russians in the ethnic units, 1959–1989 (in per cent).

urban					
	1959	1970	1979	1989	% point change
Komi ASSR	15.6	29.8	36.5	41.8	26.2
all ASSRs	8.7	9.9	11.0	12.6	3.9
all SSRs	4.5	4.8	5.7	5.4	0.9

rural					
	1959	1970	1979	1989	% point change
Komi ASSR	2.9	5.2	8.1	11.4	8.5
all ASSRs	1.2	1.7	2.3	3.6	2.4
all SSRs	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.7	0.3

(Kaiser, 1994: 277–278)

The Komi, or Komi-Zyrian, language has not always been in difficulties. A member of the Permian branch of the Finno-Ugrian group of languages, Komi had been used as a *lingua franca* among several neighboring and related peoples for some time before the revolution (Forsyth 1992). A written Komi script was in existence, and even used briefly in education after 1372, though it was not until 1918 that a modern literary language was created. In the 1926 census Komi was the mother language of almost 100 per cent of all Komi, who comprised 92.2 per cent of the total population of 207,000 of

the Komi autonomous *oblast* (province), making it by far the most 'ethnically homogeneous' of all the ethno-national units of the RSFSR in the 1920s and in a position to enjoy considerable ethnic autonomy. The 1920s have been referred to as a period of "*Zyrianizatsiya*" (Zyrianization, or in the modern usage, 'Komi-ization')—when the state sponsored and even actively encouraged indigenous linguistic and cultural development, published Komi-language works, and most importantly, developed a system of Komi-language schools (see Popov 1996a, 1996b; Beznosikov 1973).

However the 30s introduced a period of economic development and growth and with the accompanying immigration to the region, the Komi became increasingly outnumbered and marginalized within their own republic. From the overwhelming majority in 1926 the ethnic Komi percentage of the republican population dropped dramatically by the 1959 census to 30.1 per cent. The effect of this initiated a process of assimilation, which, coupled with decreasing birth rates, further weakened the position of the Komi to 23.3 per cent of the republic's total population by the last census in 1989 (see Lallukka 1990, 1995). The language began to suffer even within the Komi community from a popular belief that it was overly complicated and a 'peasant' or 'uncultured' (*nekulturni*) language, contributing to and maintaining feelings of embarrassment and shame within Komi-speaking circles. By the end of the 1980s, all of these factors necessitated a pro-active approach to change general attitudes to the language and to halt its erosion. A new role for the language in public life had to be found.

The more open climate of the 1980s, which allowed the possibility of discussing the future of the Komi and their role in the public life of the republic, led to the formation of regional cultural organizations. Within the republic, *Komi kotyr* (Komi family) was established with the aid of the communist apparatus but soon developed into a non-party open forum to discuss cultural issues, including the status of the Komi language in public life and in education (see Ilin 1995; Shabayev 1994). More active parts of the Komi movement concluded that the best way to protect their interests was through corporate participation in the political process (Ilin 1995; Mityusheva and Krasilnikova 1994; see also Khazanov 1995). The Committee for the Revival of the Komi People (*Komi voytyrös sövmödan komitet*) was created as a permanent body representing all Komi at the first Congress of the Komi People, held in Syktyvkar in January 1991. It was this body that was awarded a *de jure* official role in the political arena by the republic's government when

it was incorporated as a government advisory committee, and its leader, Valeri Markov, was made a senior advisor to the 'president'.<sup>1</sup> At last the Komi had a place in government. On the language front, both the Komi and Russian languages became official state languages in 1992 and a program 'to preserve and develop the Komi language' was adopted by the republican government in 1994. After decades when elite status meant Russian identity, ethnic elites began to back toward their own cultures as an alternative (Kha-zanov 1995). Yet there were still more demands to be made. The promotion of the Komi language in the administration only exposed the weakness of the education system.

### **History of Higher Education in the Komi Language**

In a just world, if a cultural or linguistic community is large enough to support a native-language university, then the state should provide one. But Schöpflin (1996: 64) points out that it is not so simple, as the majority is often unwilling to accept that the minority has intellectual aspirations that might make its members fit to govern and to "compete in the world of moral values where the majority insists on exclusivity". If the minority's moral worth is accepted, then it can participate in the shaping of the state. "The university, therefore, acquires a symbolic, moral value that takes it right out of the politics of education". Under the Soviets this was certainly the case, and the study of Russian in universities was a prerequisite to advancement—here lies the key to the importance of native-language higher education in the contemporary context.

The use of the Komi language as a medium of higher education has had a very short lifespan in the republic, which can be traced back to several periods of discrimination against Komi language and culture by the Soviet state—the period of direct attacks in the 1930s, and Russification programs of the 1950s onwards. One has to go back to the early 1920s and 30s when Komi was used in teacher training as a medium of instruction, and not only for language and literature but for a whole range of subjects. But the period of denuncements and terror during the late 1930s specifically targeted minority language use in the universities (Sanukov 1996: 665), implying that counter-revolutionary, or 'anti-Soviet', behavior was being generated by the non-Russian minorities under cover of their national 'incomprehensible'

languages. Afterward, Komi became a subject of instruction through Russian. Prior to 1994, there had been two options for those Komi who wanted to carry on studying their native language and culture after finishing school: either to train as a teacher of Komi language or literature in the schools, or else to study its philology and folklore. There were several teacher training institutes prior to the 1980s. The Komi State Pedagogical Institute was established in 1931 and was the primary educational facility for Komi who wanted to continue the study of their language. As well, two pedagogical colleges operated in Syktyvkar which also played a role in the training of teachers and kindergarten workers. The republic's Institute for the Improvement of Teacher Qualifications was not only at the forefront of the preparation of materials to be taught in the schools of the republic, but also was engaged in conducting courses, many in the Komi language, for teachers to familiarize them with the latest teaching techniques and materials.

When Syktyvkar State University (SGU) was founded in 1972, an alternative to teacher training was possible for those who wanted to continue the study of Komi—a Komi language and literature department was opened within the Philology Faculty. Within its structure, students were able to engage in serious philological studies, studies of folklore and literature, or the study of the language in combination with journalism for a future career in Komi-language media. It was this department that was instrumental in the preparation of the ethnic Komi cultural elites, such as writers, poets and journalists. However even these careers began to grow scarce while the language and its use continued to be eroded.

### **The Creation of FUF**

When Komi gained official status with the adoption of the law “On the State Languages of the Komi Republic”, thus publicly and legally committing the republican government to the creation of a bilingual state apparatus, the need for a more broadly-based higher education in the Komi language became critical. The newly-created Ministry of Nationality Affairs recognized this fact with the creation of a “Program to develop and protect the Komi language”, however just exactly where or how these bilinguals would be educated had not been determined. In 1993 the ministry was informed by Moscow that no further funding was assured for programs. Its purported

response was to create, by government decree, a Finno-Ugrian Faculty (FUF) within SGU in January 1994. Here was an institution and program designed to meet the challenge.

The faculty has its roots in both the philological and historical disciplines and was organized into two halves—the Komi/Finno-Ugrian philology and literature section and the regional studies, or *regionovedeniye*, section. The former was separated from the university's main Philology Faculty to provide the backbone of FUF alongside the newly-created regional studies section. As well, the government provided funds to create two scientific laboratories in connection to FUF: 'Geographic names of the Komi Republic' and an 'Ethnological Fund'. The first group of 31 regional studies students arrived in autumn 1994, with enrollment more than doubling to over 60 in both the second and third years. A slightly higher number of students are enrolled in Komi/ Finno-Ugrian philology.<sup>2</sup> The Finno-Ugrian Faculty has programs at both the bachelor's and post-graduate levels and stands alone within the university of offering the equivalent of a European Baccalaureate. Over the period of 1994–1996 I was able to conduct surveys among the students of the regional studies section, many of the answers of which are included below.

The new institutional arrangement has been accompanied by two long-awaited innovations in the program, reflecting the need of the state for public servants who are both bilingual and knowledgeable about the republic, as well as the desire of the current Komi leadership to include traditional culture in the curriculum:

A) The development of the regional studies section indicates a movement towards multi-disciplinary education and marks a departure from traditional post-secondary education in Russia. What makes the FUF program all the more revolutionary is that the focus is on the surrounding local environment, with training to become a general regional expert, regional ecologist, or a specialist in local and republican government. Over 20 per cent of all regional studies students responding to the questionnaire about the course stated that the regional focus was their main reason for taking the course. The subjects offered in regional studies, beyond compulsory subjects such as Russian language and maths, include: traditional culture of the Komi, modern Komi language, regional history, foreign languages (including English, French, and German), psychology and pedagogy, religious beliefs of the region, cultural studies, ethnography of the region, international relations of the region, modern Finno-Ugrian languages (Finnish and Hungarian),

regional ecology, and regional economics. Most of these subjects figure among the responses of the students when asked what they thought were the most interesting subjects. As well, FUF has included summer field courses that also focus on regional themes, including archaeological digs and ethnographic expeditions. While in the past officials in the Ministry of Education recognized that one of the weaknesses of general education in the republic was a lack of knowledge of methods of teaching local Komi ethnographic and cultural materials (Personal communication, December 1995), FUF was making progress at changing this.

B) Perhaps regional studies' most unique aspect is the compulsory study of the Komi language in regional studies. All of FUF's philology students are fluent in the language, however this is far from the case among the regional studies students—only 15 per cent of the first three years claimed it as native, with another 9 per cent claiming both Russian and Komi equally as their mother tongues. In all, only 21 per cent of all regional studies students attended schools where the language was taught, though this figure does not necessarily indicate that they studied it. Despite a general perception that Komi is a difficult language to master, the majority of students in FUF (70 per cent) support its use in education—several even stated that they had entered FUF to learn the language. Alongside this language element is an introduction to traditional Komi culture. This is finding its way into the curriculum not only directly, through taught classes in ethnography and cultural studies, but also indirectly—the Komi-language texts are introducing students to folklore and traditional knowledge that had not been widely-available before in Russian. The study of the language is perceived as having taken on a new importance and through it, traditional Komi culture is also finding an outlet in education.

Another related part of the FUF program concerns international relations. One aspect of the ethnic revival among the Komi has been the desire for more information about their Finno-Ugrian heritage, and the ties that link them to peoples both in Russia and abroad. For one student, the program exposed his own weaknesses: "When I arrived at FUF, we had a small quiz just to evaluate our general knowledge. One of the questions asked us to name the related nations of the Komi—the Finno-Ugrian peoples. There are more than a dozen and I couldn't name any other than the Komi-Permyaks" (Personal communication, August 1996). He was both angry about and ashamed of this fact. By learning about the Finno-Ugrian peoples, many

Komi students are beginning to feel part of the larger Finno-Ugrian community and to take some pride in this fact, further strengthening their own Komi identities. FUF has already begun to explore these links in depth and each year, several students participate in cross-cultural courses organized with the Volga Finno-Ugrians (Udmurt, Mari, Moksha and Erzya), alternately held in the four republics (Komi, Udmurtia, Mari-El, Mordovia).

There have also been some concrete benefits of these Finno-Ugrian ties. Due to the new freedom to develop and maintain links with other Finno-Ugrian republics both in Russia and abroad, FUF has actively pursued educational exchanges and is sending students to foreign universities to study. Both the university and republic are keen to foster ties with Finno-Ugrian states abroad, namely Finland, Hungary and Estonia. The first two of these languages have been introduced to the FUF curriculum. The republic has arranged for a Finnish language teacher to lecture as part of an agreement between the two governments, and is looking for a Hungarian specialist. Perhaps symbolic of this international outlook, FUF remains the only faculty of SGU that offers classes in international relations.

### **Some Problems and Dangers**

Needless to say, the undertaking of such a new program as FUF has not been without some problems and dangers. Discussing the current needs of higher education in Mordovia, one author commented that "...the universities, are called upon to be not only centres of education and science, but also as centres of national culture" (Bryzhinski 1993: 129). While many hoped that FUF would fulfill this role as the first Komi 'national' faculty, the program has not developed as it was first envisioned. The role of the language has been downgraded from the original intentions, as Komi language ability has not been made a prerequisite for admission. Notwithstanding this, as of yet no other courses have been devised and taught in the Komi language, and the language focus is now shared with the learning of English and German. The Komi language has been criticized as being a mere window-dressing on the regional studies curriculum—visually appealing but without any substance. Sissons (1993: 108–109) made similar observations of the Maori language reforms for schools in New Zealand in 1990. Despite all of the rhetoric about regional studies providing the current political elites with

'new Komi cadres', the fact that the majority of its students are not Komi-speaking, or even ethnic Komi, puts this statement into question. While Komi philology remains the almost exclusive domain of ethnic Komi, the percentage of Komi entering regional studies has been constantly dropping since its first year (69 per cent) to 36 per cent in the 1996–97 academic year. If FUF and regional studies was, as has been suggested, a response to the need of Komi-speaking students to increased options in higher education, then it too has not been successful. The first class included 24 per cent native Komi-speakers, which has decreased to just 5 per cent in 3 years.

The phenomenal interest in regional studies, and corresponding competition to get into the program, has also had some negative consequences, as attention has been focused away from the Komi philology section. While many would justifiably point to the need for political elites, cultural elites, which have been the product of Komi philology in the university for years, are in danger of being relegated to secondary status thus perpetuating the old division between Komi cultural elites and Russian political elites. A senior official in the Ministry of Nationality Affairs justified this inequality—she pointed out that regional studies had stronger links with government and provided more opportunities for work upon completion (Personal communication, September 1996), dismissing the possibilities of philology students as 'limited'. A counter-argument by philology supporters is that the regional studies section is spreading itself too thin and does not allow students to specialize in any one particular area, a disadvantage in the future when it comes time to look for employment.

While the first wave of rural students entered full of both a newly-found pride in their 'Komi-ness' and questions about that Komi identity, this has largely given way to a jaded feeling for the new arrangements, a feeling shared by many in the teaching profession in the villages, who point out a number of factors giving an impression that the system discriminates against rural students. There is a problem of accommodation, as FUF students have reportedly been allocated an inadequate number of rooms to meet the needs of such a popular course (Personal communication, August 1996). What this has *de facto* resulted in is a preference for local Syktyvkar students who can live at home. Consequently, the group most affected is the rural student body—which more often than not—is travelling the greatest distance and coming from a poorer economic background which can ill-afford housing in the private housing market. But the examination requirements are perhaps

an even greater obstacle to the regional studies program, which currently consist of Russian language, History, and English language. As the perceived importance of English as a world language of international communication is increasing in Russia, it is widely used as an entrance exam. However in some rural schools, there has not even been the option of English classes—it is not uncommon that rural schools make use of whatever skills are available, be that English, German or French. But the entrance exam is solely available in English. The teacher of one young student found the examination process incomprehensible:

“Vanya,<sup>3</sup> he’s one of the bright students, he’s going to enter the history faculty at SGU. He wanted to enter FUF-regional studies, but when he took the exams, he got a ‘3’ in English. It was a very difficult text to translate. So he took the exams for history—also Russian, History, and English, and this time he received a ‘5’. So why did FUF require such a difficult exam? It’s crazy” (Personal communication, August 1996).

It is widely accepted among rural educators that the best English teachers remain in the cities and have left rural schools with hopeless English instruction, or, in many cases, with no instruction at all. Finally, there is the problem of funding for rural students. Particularly now during the Russia-wide crisis in agriculture, rural students do not have additional funds to enable them to study in the capital. Their parents sporadically do not receive wages for months and, if students do not have relations to live with, they can rarely afford a place in the dormitory even if a room is available. The danger is, of course, that the lack of rural students entering FUF will result in a lack of Komi leaders in the villages, something already recognized by some educators: “It is difficult for us that our children don’t go on to other faculties, like economics, law, maths. We need trained people to come here, [we need] our children to return with this knowledge. But they just cannot compete with the city children” (Personal communication, September 1996).

### **Successes of FUF**

Despite these problems, FUF must be viewed as a positive development in the history of Komi ‘national’ education. The greatest accomplishment of the FUF program, and especially regional studies, has been the bringing together of a number of disparate disciplines within one program. As the

course has put the local region at the centre of the curriculum, all students are being introduced to Komi folklore, ethnography, ethnobotany, and local history which includes the period of pre-Russian colonization. Komi language and culture has been introduced for the first time to those urban Komi or non-Komi who would not have been exposed to them before. It is hoped that after five years, these students will be not only functionally bilingual but also culturally sensitive to the needs of the indigenous Komi, characteristics that have been lacking in previous administrations. Komi-speakers, on the other hand, have also benefitted. On a basic level, regional studies is allowing students to carry on their study of the language after completing school without being forced into teaching or language studies. The course has been a positive step forward in terms of cross-cultural dialogue—Komi students are being introduced to the history and culture of the long-standing local Russian communities, particularly those of the Old Believer settlements of Ust-Tsilma *rayon* in the far north-western corner of the republic.

As it was created by government decree, perhaps not surprisingly direct ties with the government have been created, especially in terms of work-training and experience. By the final years, students are able to gain on-job experience in a number of government ministries and departments, including those of international trade, nationality affairs, culture, environment, and tourism, which may lead to permanent positions after graduation. These opportunities are mainly for regional studies students, though with the expansion of Komi language teacher training across the republic, one can assume that graduates of the philology section are also benefitting from increased employment opportunities in pedagogy.

Finally, and most importantly for the Komi students themselves, the mere existence of FUF is an important symbol of the higher status of the Komi and their language and culture in the republic. In the past many Komi youths were ashamed of their ethnicity, but this has been replaced by a desire to learn more about themselves and their culture. As one student told me, “The worst thing about school is that nothing is taught about the history of the Komi region. *Nothing* ... I didn’t know anything about my own people, about their history. That’s what we need to know, our history” (Personal communication, August 1996). According to the students, the curriculum devised for FUF is meeting this need and addressing past omissions in knowledge. Students who are now able to learn about their Finno-Ugrian neighbors, especially Finland and Hungary, are also learning more about themselves, aided in part though

inter-regional and international student exchanges. The popularity of such courses on Komi ethnography, regional history and economics, as well as the international relations of the region, is an indication of an awakened search for knowledge of the place of the Komi in the world around them. This had not been possible before FUF.

### **The Future of the Komi Language in Higher Education**

FUF seems set to expand even further in terms of both numbers and curriculum. FUF, or more specifically, regional studies has the third highest application rate in the university, only after the economics and law faculties. For every place available in the 1996–97 academic year, there were four applicants. It seems that particularly urban students are recognizing the link between long-term job prospects and the necessity of knowing the Komi language. And the multi-disciplinary approach is now being attempted across the north. Petrozavodsk State University's campus in Apatity, Murmanskaya Oblast has recently created a Northern Studies department because it has recognized that “today one of the main problems in the successful development of the Arctic regions of Russia, are insufficient highly-qualified specialists, familiar not only with the basic specializations, but with a knowledge of the Arctic's uniqueness”, and especially the lack of educated representatives of the northern indigenous minorities (Anon. 1997: 5). There are also plans to expand the Komi language half of FUF, as a new emphasis is being put on training Komi-language translators, teachers for national and Russian-program schools, and methodologists (Personal communication, December 1995). In 1996 the Komi language and literature section had the second highest percentage of graduate students in SGU (one-fifth), indicating the continued role of the course in preparing the Komi cultural elites in the republic. One rural teacher was proud to tell me how two of her students were using their Komi-language skills to get ahead and future employment through the combined philology-journalism program. (Personal communication, August 1996).

In order to augment these reforms in higher education, the republic has recognized the need to expend more resources on the rural network of schools and to expand the national school system. What has become evident is that the rural Komi education system has not been preparing students for higher education despite a great many enthusiastic and devoted teachers. It

has been too easy to blame all of its ills on the past curriculum, though individuals in the pedagogical field now acknowledge that many mistakes were made even with the best of intentions—now there is a need to develop a new program in the Komi language and expand the use of it from the language itself and literature to other subjects. The state must also support the teaching staff and schools with more finances. It is necessary to create a thorough system of Komi-language education that will take children from the pre-school and throughout their school career into the higher educational institutes, so that the language will stay with them in future work. It has already been recognized as essential the expansion of the system of ethnic-Komi *gimnaziya*, or specialized grammar schools with their focus on traditional culture, the beginnings of which have already been made with the first primary-level grammar school opening in the village of Shoynaty (Storozhevsk), 96 km away from Syktyvkar.

## Conclusions

The overall success of the program at FUF and indeed, of Komi language and content education in the university as a whole, will be judged in terms of the graduates that the faculty will produce and whether they will be able to transmit and support Komi culture and language to the wider society, and especially to government. As of yet, it is still too early to pass this judgement, in this, FUF's fourth year as the first class will be graduating in June. Many of the hopes of the Komi leadership are resting on these future graduates. However, in the long term FUF can only provide the institutional setting for Komi language and culture and is only as good as the students entering it. As the former dean of the faculty commented to me two years ago, "We cannot solve the problem. Everyone is complaining about the language. But if people do not come to us speaking it, what can we do?"

## Notes

1) The current leader of the republic, Yuri Spiridonov, has chosen to use the term *glava*, or 'head', instead of the more conventional term 'president' because, as he stated on Russian television, there is no room in Russia for two presidents (*Bez retushi* - RTR, Russian Public Television, 27 March 1995).

- 2) When FUF was first created, philology enrollment included 63 first year students, 46—second year, 39—third year, 32—fourth year, and 37 fifth year students, for a total of 217 (Former dean of the Faculty Gagiyeva, personal communication, March 1995).
- 3) Not his real name.
- 4) In the Russian education system, marks range from a high of '5' to a low of '1'.

### Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the B. B. Roberts Fund at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge.

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