



VOLODYMYR KULYK. REVIEW: MICHAEL MOSER, *LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE DISCOURSE ON LANGUAGES IN UKRAINE UNDER PRESIDENT VIKTOR YANUKOVYCH* (25 FEBRUARY 2010–28 OCTOBER 2012) (STUTT GART: IBIDEM-VERLAG, 2013). 506 PP. BIBLIOGRAPHY. ISBN: 978-3-8382-0497-0 // AB IMPERIO. 2013. No. 3. Pp. 485-489.

VOLODYMYR KULYK. WHAT INSTEAD OF WHY: A REVIEW OF MICHAEL MOSER'S BOOK ON THE LANGUAGE POLICY IN UKRAINE UNDER YANUKOVYCH // HISTORIANS.IN.UA. 08.01.2014. [HTTP://WWW.HISTORIANS.IN.UA/INDEX.PHP/UKRAYINSKA-MOVA/998-VOLODYMYR-KULYK-WHAT-INSTEAD-OF-WHY-A-REVIEW-OF-MICHAEL-MOSERS-BOOK-ON-THE-LANGUAGE-POLICY-IN-UKRAINE-UNDER-YANUKOVYCH.](http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/ukrayinska-mova/998-voodymyr-kulyk-what-instead-of-why-a-review-of-michael-mosers-book-on-the-language-policy-in-ukraine-under-yanukovyh)

**Michael MOSER**

## **A BRIEF RESPONSE TO VOLODYMYR KULYK**

Although I generally do not like the genre of responses to reviews as such,<sup>1</sup> I regard this as an exceptional case – not because I feel the need to react to the review’s main criticism (namely, that my book offers no explanations),<sup>2</sup> but because Volodymyr Kulyk builds his review on a very disturbing judgment to which I simply have to react. Specifically, Kulyk writes the following:

Given its widespread use in Ukrainian society, Russian is anything but marginal and thus, Moser concludes, in no need of protection by the Charter or, indeed, any other legal instrument. (P. 486)<sup>3</sup>

In fact, I have never written (or said) that the Russian language is not in need of legal protection, neither in my monograph nor elsewhere, because

---

<sup>1</sup> Having come upon Volodymyr Kulyk’s review of my book in *Ab Imperio*, I originally intended to respond, but then refrained. In a brief correspondence, I made Volodymyr Kulyk aware of the fact that his major reproach or, in fact, accusation is unfounded. As a reaction, he has now further disseminated his review. I would like to sincerely thank the editors of *Ab Imperio* and *historians.in.ua* for giving me the opportunity to respond.

<sup>2</sup> The situation is interesting because it demonstrates that the interpretation of the concept “explanation” is a quite relative issue in the humanities, especially in a “soft” field such as language policy. I am well familiar with Volodymyr Kulyk’s works, but I have not really found them particularly explanatory, see my own review of Volodymyr Kulyk’s book (Volodymyr Kulyk. *Dyskurs ukraïns’kyh medii: identychnosti, ideologii, vladni stosunki*. Kyïv: “Krytyka”, 2010. – 655 c. – ISBN 978-966-8978-39-5, forthcoming in *Krytyka*).

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter, references to Kulyk’s review give page numbers from its publication in *Ab Imperio*.

I have always been deeply convinced that any language, whether it is widespread or not, needs some sort of legal protection in any country. What I do try to demonstrate in the book is that although the Russian language in Ukraine has been protected by the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages for several years, it does not in fact match the definition of a regional or minority language according to the Charter. I remind my readers that according to the Charter, regional or minority languages are “traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State’s population.”<sup>4</sup> As all statistical data confirm, Russian in Ukraine is used not only as a first language but also as a second (or even third, etc.) language to such an extent that in fact the majority of Ukrainian nationals – and definitely not just “a group numerically smaller than the rest of the population” – use Russian on a quite regular basis. Therefore, the Charter (which has been abused in political discourse for decades) cannot be regarded as an adequate instrument for the legal protection of the Russian language in Ukraine.

I still maintain my conviction that “the Russian language has never been under threat in Ukraine, but on the contrary tends to threaten the vitality of the Ukrainian language as well as other languages of Ukraine,” and I try to demonstrate in my book why I think so. However, while it is true that I have never aimed to address the question in regard to what precise legal basis the Russian language should be protected in Ukraine in the future (do I really have to?<sup>5</sup>), I have notably never, ever argued that the “question” of “whether the state should look for other legal means of overcoming an obvious discrepancy between the social functions of Russian and its legal status” (as Kulyk puts it) is “illegitimate.” Aside from that, I do remind the readers of my book that the Russian language has in fact always been legally protected in independent Ukraine, most importantly, by the language law of 1989 and the Constitution of 1996. What I also emphasize is that regarding Russian, contrary to widespread beliefs, almost all regulations of the Charter have (unsurprisingly) always been fulfilled (or, in fact, overfulfilled), as repeatedly confirmed by various international institutions.

I am deeply surprised by Kulyk’s view that the relevance of “*Russkii Mir*” strategies or the Russian government’s policy regarding its “compatriots”

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Strasbourg, 5.XI.1992. Part 1. Article 1a // <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/148.htm>. Notably, I did not reiterate the inaccurate claim that the Charter applies only to endangered languages.

<sup>5</sup> I do not regard it as illegitimate to discuss a problem without necessarily offering remedy.

for language policy in Ukraine is not “obvious.” I am no less surprised that Kulyk apparently believes that Russia’s treatment of its Ukrainian minority and the Ukrainian minority language (about which very little is known to the supposed average reader of my book) is of no interest against the background of official Russia’s repeated statements regarding the status of the Russian language in Ukraine. What I ultimately fail to understand, however, is Kulyk’s argument that my discussion of these and related problems allegedly “den[ies] purely domestic reasons for the promotion of Russian in Ukraine, whether it is concern about Russophone citizens’ rights or preoccupation with winning their votes in future elections” (P. 487). What kind of logic is this?

Admittedly, I do not offer in my book an in-depth analysis of the reasons for the alleged “continued prevalence of Ukrainian in many social domains (including education and broadcasting), a problem that deserves scholarly attention no less than the not-so-drastring changes in favor of Russian” (P. 488). What I do offer are statistical data from various sources, which, by the way, do not confirm Kulyk’s surprising claims. Aside from that, I again fail to see the reviewer’s logic in his further argument: In what sense does a focus on the role of key figures of Ukrainian language policy necessarily “preclud[e] an analysis of the reasons” for the alleged “continued prevalence of Ukrainian?” (P. 488)

While reproaching me for not having examined “language policy activities of the opposition parties” (P. 489), Kulyk interestingly fails to mention that I make my readers aware of that from the outset.<sup>6</sup> I do accept, *inter alia*, Kulyk’s criticism for “long quotes,” but I would like to add that I myself find them more revealing than any judgment that an author could have imposed on his or her readers. The eight pages allotted to the Charter that Kulyk finds particularly disturbing are in my personal view especially important: Even in scholarly works, the Charter is stereotypically discussed in such a manner as if all its paragraphs were of relevance for Ukraine, which is not the case at all. As all official documents merely list the numbers of the paragraphs adopted by Ukraine, I found that my method of republishing the Charter greatly contributes to the transparency we desperately need.

---

<sup>6</sup> In the preface, I write the following: “My focus is on language discourse in Ukraine and the political actions in the field of language policy as practiced by the ruling political forces in Ukraine. I pay little attention to language discourse as practiced by the opposition parties, including those of the far-right.” Michael Moser. *Language Policy and the Discourse on Languages in Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovych* (25 February 2010–28 October 2012). Stuttgart, 2013. P. 12.

The discussion “why these parts were excluded and others accepted as the state’s obligations” (P. 489) may admittedly be intriguing, but I have never felt obliged to initiate it.

Regarding Volodymyr Kulyk’s concluding remarks, I would like to note that it does not disturb me if anyone has the impression that my profile is “strikingly different from those of most Western scholars dealing with Ukraine,” because I have for my own part never paid great attention to any (mostly, stereotypical) differences between “Western” and “non-Western” scholars. However, Kulyk’s judgment that I generally suffer from “a lack of engagement with academic works in English” has not ceased to puzzle me since I read it for the first time.<sup>7</sup>

As I greatly doubt that Volodymyr Kulyk’s review correctly conveys the spirit of my book, I would like to conclude with a sentence from my preface: “To be sure, I do believe that the Russian language contributes to the linguistic wealth of Ukraine, but I do not think that ‘the struggle for native Russian’ as currently practiced in Ukraine should be utilized to hamper the dissemination of Ukrainian as the state language.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> First, I do not understand why one should engage with only English-language literature? Second, I am still asking myself which concrete publications I should have quoted? Third, I would like to offer here a selection of the reviews I have published during past years (a couple of others are forthcoming): Laada Bilaniuk, *Contested Tongues. Language Politics and Cultural Correction in Ukraine*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005 // Zeitschrift für Slawistik. 2009. Vol. 54. No. 1. Pp. 117-121; Movna politika ta movna situatsiia v Ukraïni. Analiz i rekomendatsiï. Proekt INTAS “Language Policy in Ukraine: Anthropological, Linguistic and Further Perspectives” (2006–2008). Za redaktsieiu Iuliane Besters-Dil’ger. Kiïv: Vidavnychii dim “Kievo-Mogilians’ka akademiia”, 2008. 363 st. / Language Policy and Language Situation in Ukraine. Analysis and Recommendations. INTAS Project “Language Policy in Ukraine: Anthropological, Linguistic and Further Perspectives”. Frankfurt am Main u. a.: Peter Lang, 2009 // Zeitschrift für Slawistik. 2010. Vol. 55. No. 3. Pp. 369-372; Lubaś, Władysław: *Polityka językowa*. Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2009 (Komparacja współczesnych języków słowiańskich). 560 pp. // Die Welt der Slaven. 2012. Vol. LVII. No. 1. Pp. 178-184; Kamusella, Tomasz. *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008 // Die Welt der Slaven. 2012. Vol. LVII. No. 2. Pp. 399-401; Søvik, Margrethe B. *Support, resistance and pragmatism: An examination of motivation in language policy in Kharkiv, Ukraine*. Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2007 (Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis. Stockholm Slavic Studies 34). 351 pp. // Journal of Ukrainian Studies. 2010. Vol. 35-36. Pp. 361-363; A brief comment on: Bill Bowring, Law in a Linguistic Battlefield: The Language of the New State Versus the ‘Language of the Oppressors’ in Ukraine (Language & Law, Vol. 1 (2012). (urn:nbn:de:0009-30-33434)) // Language & Law. 29.04.2013. <http://www.languageandlaw.de/comments/3634>.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Moser. Language Policy and the Discourse on Languages in Ukraine. P. 11.

## SUMMARY

Michael Moser responds to the review of his book *Language Policy and the Discourse on Languages in Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovich (25 February 2010–28 October 2012)*, written by Volodymyr Kulyk and published in *Ab Imperio* (no. 3, 2013) and on the Web Portal *historians.in.ua*. Moser argues that some important theses of his book were misinterpreted by Kulyk, and explains his position.

## РЕЗЮМЕ

Михаэль Мозер отвечает на рецензию своей книги о языковой политике в Украине во время президентства Виктора Януковича (*Language Policy and the Discourse on Languages in Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovich (25 February 2010–28 October 2012)*), написанной Володымыром Кулыком и опубликованной в *Ab Imperio* (№ 3, 2013) и на портале *historians.in.ua*. Мозер утверждает, что некоторые важные тезисы его книги были неверно переданы Кулыком, и разъясняет свою позицию.