

K Y R G Y Z S T A N

SECTION A

Capital

Bishkek 631,300 (1991 est.)

Area

198,500 sq km (76,600 sq mi)

Form of government

Republic

GDP—per capita

Purchasing power parity—\$2,300 (1999 est.)

Population

4,685,230 (July 2000 est.)

Ethnic composition

Kirghiz	52.4%
Russian	18.0%
Uzbek	12.9%
Ukrainian	2.5%
German	2.4%
Other	11.8%

Official language

Kirghiz (Kyrgyz), Russian

In March of 1996, the Kyrgyzstani Legislature amended the Constitution to make Russian an official language, along with Kirghiz, in territories and work places where Russian-speaking citizens predominate.

Other languages

Uzbek, Ukrainian, German

Legislation dealing with the use of languages

The Constitution, adopted on May 5, 1993

Later amended in 1996, in Article 5, declares Kyrgyz “the state language of the Republic”. It also provides Russian with the status of a language for interethnic communication, guarantees the rights of individuals to choose language freely and the protection of languages of all ethnic groups living in the country.

Law of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic on the State Language of the Kyrgyz SSR (September 23, 1989)

“The law establishes Kyrgyz language as a state language. It contains 40 Articles dealing with the rights of citizens to choose/use language and guarantees for protection of such rights, establishing frameworks for operation of the state language in public authorities, enterprises, and institutions, in spheres of education, science and culture, administration of justice; and regulates use of language in names and mass media. Russian is provided with the status of the language of interethnic communication; however, it also can be used in all above-mentioned spheres.”

Resolution on Entering into Force of the Law of the Kyrgyz SSR on State Language of the Kyrgyz SSR, (September 23, 1989)

“Provides for the procedure of entering into force of the Law. Sets the special terms in respect to operation of the state language:

- 1) 1989-1998 - transitional period, when Russian and other languages can be used together with the state language
- 2) January 1, 1999 - full operation of the state language

Obliges Council of Ministers to allocate special funds for the financing arrangements, foreseen by the language policy, to create conditions for learning the state language, to start issuing documents in the state language, etc. “

Decree #120 on Measures on Migration Processes Regulation in the Kyrgyz Republic, (June 14, 1994)

“Recognizes the language issue as one of the reasons of emigration, therefore, provides Russian with the status of official language in those entities, where majority of members are Russian-speakers, also in those spheres, where use of Russian is “inevitable”.

Obliges the Government to reconsider the staff recruitment policy with the aim of fair representation of Russian-speaking population in the governmental agencies, administrations of public enterprises and institutions; to reconsider the schedule of switching to the state language in public administration, etc.”

Decision on Amending Article 5 of the Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, (June 6, 1996)

“Gives the opinion on possibility of amending Article 5 of the Constitution in order to provide the status of official language to Russian.”

Decree #21 on Further Development of the State Language of the Kyrgyz Republic, (January 20, 1998)

“Introduces a new concept of development of the state language with the creation of the special agency for its implementation - National Commission on the State Language under the auspices of the President, establishes the Fund for Development of the State Language, obliges the Government to allocate money for that in the republican budget.”

Background notes

The language issue has become one of the most controversial in Kyrgyzstan during the years of independence. Since the very beginning of the history of Soviet Kyrgyzstan up until the 1960's, there were satisfactory conditions for the development of the Kyrgyz language. Notwithstanding the fact that Russian was the official language according to the Constitution of the Soviet Federation, Kyrgyz was widely used in the country. It was taught as a special course in educational institutions at all levels. Kyrgyz literature, art and history were very popular among people of all ages.

But at the beginning of 1960's, the official policy of the ruling Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan changed towards Russification. As a result the language was withdrawn from the school curriculum and from almost all universities. By the end of the 1980's there was only one Kyrgyz school left in the capital city. Russians and other non-indigenous people knew almost no Kyrgyz and the Kyrgyz people themselves lost touch with their language as well. Russian became dominant in all spheres of social life and Kyrgyz became a language of the rural areas.

At the end of Perestroika in September of 1989, the Law on State Language was adopted. The law starts with a Preamble, celebrating the historical value of the Kyrgyz language as one of the most ancient Turk languages. It goes on to condemn the official policy of the previous decades that diminished its use and acknowledges an urgent need for special measures of protection. Chapter I declares Kyrgyz the official language (or state language, the term used in the text), regarding it as a symbol of state sovereignty and nation building.

SECTION B

What does it cost in terms of money, time and government resources to police the country's language restrictions?

According to the National Statistics Agency, in the period covering 1989-1996, around 600,000 persons left the country. Since 1991, Kyrgyzstan has experienced its largest decrease in the Russian-speaking population. The massive emigration of Russian-speakers has considerably changed the ethnic composition of Kyrgyzstan. While in 1989 Russians constituted 21.5% of the population with 916,558 persons, by 1996 their share was 15.7%, representing only 707,750 persons. Between 1989 and 1995, the number of Ukrainians decreased from 108,000 (2.5% of the total population) to 75,700 (1.7%). As for Belarusian, their number decreased from 9,200 in 1989 (0.2% of the total population) to 7,000 in 1995 (0.16%). This has had dire repercussions on the national economy.

One of the most frequently mentioned reasons for migration was the language issue. This emigration caused in a shortage of skilled personnel in many areas during the crucial period of transition to market economy. Ultimately this resulted in a dramatic decrease in industrial production, factory closures and mass unemployment.

This in turn forced the Government to adopt extraordinary measures to rectify the situation. In June 1994 the President of Kyrgyzstan adopted the Decree #120 "On Measures on Migration Processes Regulation in the Kyrgyz Republic". For the Russian speaking population the language issue was one of the reasons for leaving the country. Therefore, to establish some additional guarantees for them, the Decree gave Russian the status of an official language in entities, where the majority of members are Russian-speakers, in those spheres, where use of Russian is "inevitable" (health care, technical sciences) and also in those parts of the country, where Russian speaking people comprise the majority.

As a result, in the following years of 1996 and 1997, the level of emigration to Russia considerably decreased. The Russian language has

been reintroduced again into all areas of the Kyrgyz society, both at the official and the non-official level. Concurrently, the remaining Russian-speakers try to adjust to the new realities, learn the Kyrgyz language and actively participate in the social and political life in modern Kyrgyz society.

The use of language in everyday life e.g. education, broadcasting and other

The improvement of the status of Russians in Kyrgyzstan, as well as difficult economic conditions in Russia, has caused a significant decline of emigration, with some ethnic Russians returning to the country.

University education is carried out largely in the Russian language. Kyrgyz instruction is possible in some departments, where textbooks are available. Russian language fluency remains an important skill for those who wish to pursue higher education.

In order to promote the development of the Slavic ethnic groups and safeguard their culture, language and traditions, a Kyrgyz-Russian (Slavic) University has been established.

Did the country ratify any international treaty dealing with the protection of minorities?

Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Kyrgyz Republic on the Legal Status of Citizens of the Russian Federation Permanently Residing on the Territory of the Kyrgyz Republic, and of Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic Residing Permanently on the Territory of the Russian Federation, October 15, 1995, Bishkek.

What else can be found out about languages and minorities?

When, in the early 1990's, the President Akayev's government practiced an aggressive policy to introduce the Kyrgyz as the official language, a Russian member of his staff created a public scandal by threatening to resign to dramatize the pressure for "Kyrgyzification" of the population.

SECTION C

Legislation dealing with the use of languages

Updated (News from May 28, 2000)

The Russian language has been assigned the status of official language by the Parliament. This measure intended to widen the legislative basis for the Russian speaking community and seemed to be aimed at the prevention of out-migration of ethnic Russians. The president Akayev stated "Russian will be more than merely official language of the Kyrgyz Republic, but rather the language for inter-ethnic communication, as well as a keystone for the integration of the Republic into the world community and a guarantee of the country's peace and prosperity in the next century."

Updated (News 2001)

Although in the year 2000 a new Language Law was adopted making Russian the official language of the Republic there is still tension between ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz is a rich, ancient language but through the Soviet times it was relegated to the second place position. The adoption of 1989 law made Kyrgyz the state language. The intention was that intellectual and political life in the Republic should be slowly switched into Kyrgyz. The celebration marking the 10th anniversary of the language law in fall 1999 clearly showed, however, that this intention was not fulfilled and many Kyrgyz themselves remained more comfortable with the Russian language in their workplace.

The Russian language law has won plaudits of the Russian speakers, but at the same time it has generated a strong reaction from Kyrgyz nationalists who worried about the fate of their language.

The controversy surrounded the presidential candidates' registration process requiring them to demonstrate proficiency in the Kyrgyz language. For the elections in October 2000 twenty politicians declared their intentions to register as candidates, yet most had been disqualified by the CEC (Central Electoral Commission) by the September 23 registration deadline. An often-cited reason for disqualification was the failure of potential candidates to pass the Kyrgyz language proficiency test.

In conducting the language proficiency test, officials have cited Article 61 of Kyrgyzstan Electoral Code, which states that each candidate should

demonstrate his or her “ability to read, write, express thoughts/ideas and make public speeches in the state language.” This provision seems to directly contradict the Kyrgyz Constitution, which forbids (Article 5.3) the denial of citizens’ rights “based upon lack of knowledge or command of the state language.”

The 2000 presidential campaign was the first occasion in which the test has been used. No attention was paid to this regulation during previous presidential contests in 1990, 1991, and 1995.

Updated (October, 2001)

The Legislative Assembly of Kyrgyzstan has started a discussion on the amendments to the Constitution passed by the upper chamber of the Parliament several days ago, which proposed that Russian language should have an official status in the country.

Some deputies proposed that Russian should be considered a second state language rather than the official one. On the contrary, other sectors manifested that if any language might become official this privilege should belong to Uzbek because approximately 14% of the Kyrgyz population speak Uzbek, whereas the percentage of Russian speakers decreased to 13%.

Updated (October 2002)

On December 24, 2001 President Akaev signed the amendments to the Constitution approved by both chambers of the Parliament earlier that year thus making Russian the official language in the country.

Source: Minelres Archive, <http://lists.delfi.lv/pipermail/minelres/>, RFE/RL Newline, January 2002

Where does one observe language to be a problem in the country?

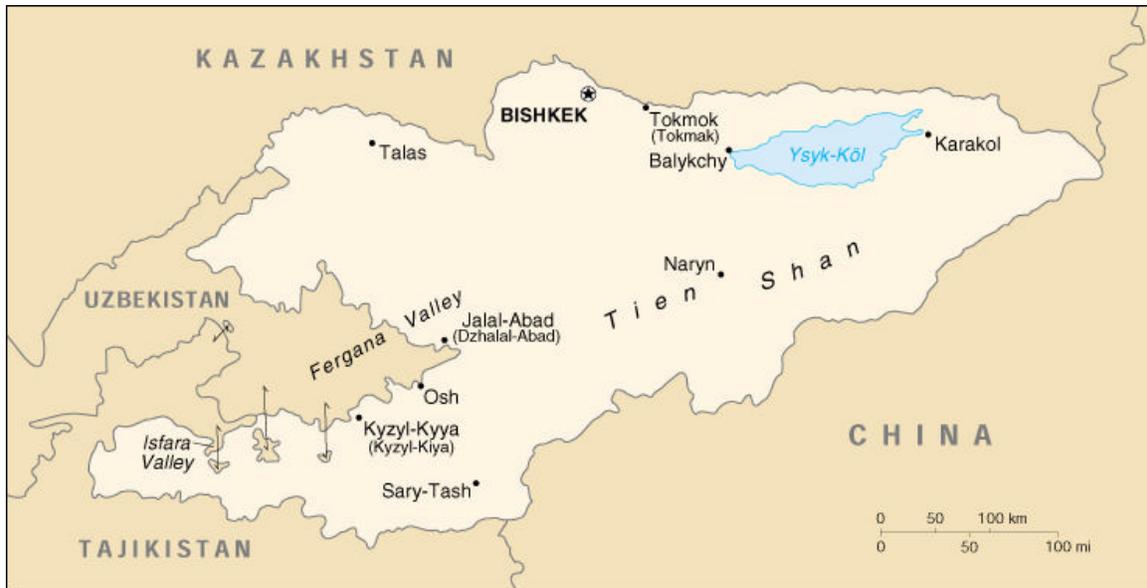
Updated (News 2001)

Another tension in the country is that of Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations. Uzbeks living in southern Kyrgyzstan, suspected of having separatist intentions, are discriminated and their discontent can grow to potentially dangerous levels. Virtually from the time of Kyrgyzstan’s independence in 1991, government officials have viewed the country’s Uzbek population with suspicion. According to Uzbek activists, during the past decade Kyrgyz leaders have sought to limit Uzbek participation in governmental structures, and downplay the role of Uzbeks in local society. Ethnic Uzbeks are not presented in the regional and local administration and in commerce and media they have to cope with governmental pressure.

National TV Corporations do not have any programming in the Uzbek language. Feeling excluded from political participation, as well as pressured in the economic sphere, some Uzbeks find an outlet in other areas, such as radical Islam.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF KYRGYZSTAN



APPENDIX B

KYRGYZSTAN – CONSTITUTION

Constitution as adopted May 5, 1993

Article 5

(1) The State language of the Kyrgyz Republic shall be the Kyrgyz language.

(2) The Kyrgyz Republic guarantees the preservation, equal and free development and functioning of the Russian language and all the other languages, used by the population of the Republic.

(3) Infringement upon citizens' rights and freedoms based upon lack of knowledge or command of the State language is not allowed.

Article 15

(3) All persons in the Kyrgyz Republic shall be equal before the law and the court. No one may be exposed to any discrimination, infringement of rights and freedoms, on the motives of origin, sex, race, nationality, language, creed, political and religious convictions or by any other public or personal conditions or circumstances.

Article 16

(2) Every person in the Kyrgyz Republic shall enjoy the right:

- to free expression and dissemination of ones thoughts, ideas, opinions, freedom of literary, artistic, scientific and technical creative work, freedom of the press, transmission and dissemination of information

Article 32

(1) Every citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic shall have the right to education.

(2) General secondary education shall be compulsory and free of charge, and everyone shall be entitled to receive it in the state educational institutions.

(3) The state shall provide for accessibility of vocational, special secondary and higher education for every person, in accordance with individual aptitude.

(4) Paid education for citizens at national and other educational institutions shall be allowed on the basis and in the procedure established by the legislation.

(5) The state shall exercise control over the activity of educational institutions.

LAW OF THE KYRGYZ SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC ON THE STATE LANGUAGE OF THE KYRGYZ SSR

Kyrgyz is the language of the indigenous population and of the majority of the citizens of the Kyrgyz SSR; it is one of the oldest of the Turkic languages and on its basis outstanding cultural riches have been created.

As a result of the distortion of the principles of Leninist nationality and language policy, the use of the Kyrgyz language was restricted in all spheres of social and state life. This necessitates the adoption of special measures for the development and protection of the Kyrgyz language with the help of legal institutions and on a legislative basis.

The legal establishment of the Kyrgyz language as the state language lays the basis for the protection and development of the Kyrgyz language and the national culture of the Kyrgyz people. This guarantees the all-round and comprehensive use of the Kyrgyz language in all spheres of state and social life of the republic.

The Kyrgyz SSR guarantees the free use of the Russian language as the language of international communication of the peoples of the USSR and does not restrict the rights of citizens of other nationalities to use their native languages.

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. As laid down by the Constitution of the Kyrgyz SSR, the Kyrgyz language is the state language of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic.

2. As the state language, the Kyrgyz language is a symbol of the national sovereignty of the Kyrgyz SSR. It is used in all spheres of state and public activity – in the economy, science, technology, public education, culture and communications between the citizens of the Kyrgyz SSSR.

3. The Kyrgyz SSR guarantees the comprehensive development of the state language, and adopts and finances a state program for its use and study.

4. In the Kyrgyz SSR, the Russian language acts as the language of international communication of the peoples of the USSR. The free development of the languages of other nationalities living in the republic is protected in the Kyrgyz SSR.

5. The present law does not regulate the use of languages in the armed forces, border guards, internal troops or railway troops on the territory of the Kyrgyz SSR.

CHAPTER 2

THE RIGHTS OF CITIZENS TO CHOOSE THEIR LANGUAGE AND GUARANTEES FOR THE EXERCISE OF THOSE RIGHTS

6. In the Kyrgyz SSR, every citizen has the right freely to choose his or her language of communication.

7. Citizens of the Kyrgyz SSR have the right to communicate with state bodies, organizations, institutions and enterprises in the state language and in other languages used in the republic.

8. Officials and others employed in the organs of state power and administration, public and cooperative organizations, law enforcement bodies, and educational, health, cultural, communications, transport, trade and service institutions, whose work brings them into contact with the general population, are obliged to ensure that the state language is used in their work.

9. Congresses, meetings, conferences, plenums and other public and political functions in the Kyrgyz SSR are conducted in the state language. Participants may choose to communicate in Russian or any other language as long as translation into the state and Russian languages is provided. The working language of international and all-Union conferences and meetings is determined by their organizing committees.

10. The obligation to teach children the state and other native languages belongs to parents.

CHAPTER 3

LANGUAGE IN THE ORGANS OF STATE POWER AND ADMINISTRATION

11. The state language is the working language of the organs of state power and administration of the Kyrgyz SSR. It is used in business, meetings and working conferences, in conjunction with a translation into the Russian language for the benefit of those who do not speak the state language.

12. Decisions of the organs of state power and administration are adopted in the state language and are published in two languages -- the state language and Russian.

13. The organs of state power and administration of the Kyrgyz SSR use the Russian language when dealing with all-Union bodies of state power and administration.

With the state organs of the Union Republics, they use the state and the Russian languages. When dealing with foreign states, they use the state language and the Russian language, since the latter is a language of international communication.

14. The organs of state power and administration of the Kyrgyz SSR and its officials address citizens and reply to their letters, applications and complaints in either the state or the Russian language.

15. The organs of state power and administration issue documents to citizens in the state and Russian languages.

16. Local organs of state power and administration in places of compact settlement of national groups (Uzbeks, Tajiks, Germans, Dzungars, Uighurs and others) have the right to use their native language alongside the state language. Translations must be provided for those not speaking the language in question.

CHAPTER 4

USING THE STATE LANGUAGE IN ENTERPRISES, ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

17. In enterprises, organizations and institutions on the territory of the Kyrgyz SSR, internal business is conducted in the state language and Russian.

In work collectives where the majority of the members of staff do not speak the state language, internal business may be conducted in either the state language or Russian or any other appropriate language. Circumstances permitting, a translation into the state language should be made.

Written correspondence between enterprises, institutions and organizations and their own correspondence with the organs of state power and administration are conducted in the state language and, where appropriate, in Russian.

18. Technical documents drafted by enterprises, institutions and organizations of the Kyrgyz SSR, and intended for use in the republic, should be composed in the state language or in Russian.

19. Accounts and financial reports prepared by enterprises, institutions and organizations should be in either the state language or Russian with a translation into the state language. Accounts and financial reports prepared by enterprises, institutions and organizations intended for use outside the territory of the Kyrgyz SSR should be in Russian.

20. The managements of enterprises, institutions and organizations are obliged to ensure that the necessary conditions exist in work collectives for the study of the state, Russian and other languages used on the territory of the republic.

CHAPTER 5

LANGUAGE IN THE SPHERE OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE

21. The state language is the main language of communication and study in the state education system of the Kyrgyz SSR, in pre-school institutions, in secondary schools, professional and technical schools and institutions of higher education. At the same time, citizens are guaranteed freedom to choose in which language they wish to study.

In pre-school institutions, secondary schools, professional and technical schools and institutions of higher education where Russian or other languages are the languages of study, teaching and study of the state language are mandatory. An examination in the state language is taken by graduating students.

In pre-school institutions, secondary schools, professional and technical schools and institutions of higher education where instruction is conducted in the state language, teaching and study of Russian, as the language of international communication of the peoples of the USSR, are mandated. An examination in the Russian language is taken by graduating students.

22. Conditions are created in the Kyrgyz SSR for the study of the Kyrgyz script in both its Arabic and Latin forms in secondary schools and in special and higher educational institutions specializing in the humanities and teaching in the Kyrgyz language.

23. In the Kyrgyz SSR, freedom of choice of language is guaranteed for scientific work. At the same time, conditions are created for broadening the scope of research in all areas of knowledge and for publishing the results of research and scientific achievements in the state language.

The defense of scientific work in pursuit of scholarly distinction is conducted in both the state and the Russian languages.

24. The state language is the main language used in the Kyrgyz SSR in the sphere of literature, the mass media, propaganda and book publishing. At the same time, the cultural interests of citizens residing in the republic and using Russian or other languages are also taken into account.

25. In places compactly settled by national and ethnic groups (Uzbeks, Tajiks, Germans, Dzungars, Uighurs and so on), access to school education, distribution of printed materials and information in the native language, and the development of national cultures are guaranteed.

CHAPTER 6

USE OF THE STATE LANGUAGE IN THE COURTS, ARBITRATION, NOTARISATION AND REGISTRATION OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

26. The courts carry out their work in the state language or in the language spoken by the majority of the population in a given locality.

Interested parties who are unfamiliar with the language in which court proceedings are being conducted are guaranteed the possibility of using their native language and of having the services of a translator according to the manner laid down by the code of court procedure of the Kyrgyz SSR.

27. The organs of state arbitration of the Kyrgyz SSR conduct their activity in the state and Russian languages.

28. Notarization and registration of official documents are performed in the state and Russian languages.

CHAPTER 7

THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN NAMES, TITLES AND INFORMATION

29. In the Kyrgyz SSR, every town, village, street, square and other administrative-territorial geographical place has a single name formed in accordance with historical tradition and the laws of the Kyrgyz language.

The names of enterprises, institutions and organizations should be written in both the state language and Russian.

30. Personal names and surnames are used and written in accordance with national traditions.

Citizens of Kyrgyz descent may adapt their surnames by the addition of a patronymic. Names and surnames in other languages are written and used in the Kyrgyz language in accordance with the rules governing the translation of foreign names.

31. Texts of official publications, stamps and seals of institutions, enterprises and organizations must be formulated in the state language accompanied by a Russian translation.

32. Announcements, advertisements, price-lists and other forms of publicity are displayed in the state and Russian languages.

Aural information is conveyed first in the state language, then in Russian.

33. Postal and telegraphic correspondence on the territory of the Kyrgyz SSR is effected in the state or the Russian language. Except for international mail, mail destined for locations outside the borders of Kyrgyzstan is addressed in Russian.

34. Commercial labels, markings, inventories of commodities and instructions for their use are written in the state language and in Russian. Trademarks remain in their original language and are not translated.

CHAPTER 8

DEFENSE AND PRESERVATION OF THE STATE LANGUAGE

35. The norms of the Kyrgyz literary language are observed when the language is used in an official capacity.

The norms of the Kyrgyz literary language are elaborated and preserved by the Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz SSR and come into force after they have been approved by the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR.

36. Within the bounds of their competence, leading officials in the organs of state power and administration, enterprises, institutions and organizations of the Kyrgyz SSR are responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the present law are met.

37. The defense and preservation of the state language, Russian and other languages are the responsibility of the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR as far as the republic as a whole is concerned, and of the relevant Councils of People's Deputies at the regional, city and village level.

38. Disrespectful or hostile attitudes to the state or any other language are forbidden in the Kyrgyz SSR, as is the deliberate infringement of the right of citizens to choose their language. Denigration of citizens on grounds of language is punishable in accordance with the law.

39. In accordance with the Constitution of the USSR and the norms of international cooperation, the Kyrgyz SSR concerns itself with the preservation, development and study of the Kyrgyz language outside the borders of the republic.

40. The procedures and time frame for the application of the present law are determined by the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR.

Signed by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR and the Secretary of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Kyrgyz SSR, Frunze [now Bishkek], September 23, 1989.

References

CIA -The World Factbook 2000

Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000

Encyclopedia Britannica, © 1999-2000 Britannica.com Inc.

Most Clearing House, Linguistic Rights, National Constitutions, Kyrgyzstan <http://www.unesco.org/most/ln2nat.htm#With>

Soros Foundations Network,

<http://soros.org/fmp2/html/laws/Zakons/Kyrgizia/ConstKyrgEng.html>

“Language Policies in Central Asia”, Kyrgyzstan, <http://soros.org/fmp2/html/laws/index.html>

Library of Congress; Kyrgyzstan, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cstdy:1:./temp/~frd_LTP2::

Website of Perry-Castañeda Library, Map Collection, The University of Texas at Austin

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html