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UZBEKISTAN REJECTS RUSSIAN CRITICISM OVER LANGUAGE POLICY

- 20.05.2020

Daily Sabah (18 May 2020)

Uzbekistan on Monday pushed back against Russian criticism of its plans to enforce the use of the Uzbek language in the civil service, in a rare rebuke to Moscow by Tashkent amid otherwise warm ties.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said this month that supporters of the move which would see officials fined if they did not conduct their work in the state language – were "in a clear minority."

Moscow also urged Uzbekistan, a former Soviet republic, to preserve the official use of Russian, saying it would "fully correspond to the spirit of history, time and the quality of bilateral relations."

But the Uzbek Foreign Ministry said in a statement that the new regulations, which are yet to be signed into law, were meant to enforce longstanding rules, and decisions on such matters were "an exclusive prerogative of the states domestic policy, interference in which is unacceptable."

The statement did not directly refer to Russia, but mentioned comments by "certain foreign officials." The Russian language remains in wide use in the country and millions of Uzbek migrant laborers work in Russia.

The language initiative comes at a time when some Uzbek intellectuals who initially welcomed President Shavkat Mirziyoyevs reform policies had become more cautious about his rapprochement with Russia.

Uzbekistan decided this year to become an observer in the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), inking a contract with Rosatom to build a nuclear power plant last year, steps that would have been impossible under Mirziyoyev's predecessor Islam Karimov, who tried to distance the country from Russia.

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