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From the Editors

An Interview with Dan Davidson [p. 447]

With this issue we inaugurate a new, occasional format for our "From the Editors" column in which we pose questions about current issues affecting the field to people whose perspective we believe will be interesting and informative to *Kritika's* readership. We are especially pleased to begin with Dan E. Davidson, who as President and co-founder of American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS has played a remarkable role in the fields of Russian, second language acquisition, and post-Soviet educational reform. He has also been active and influential in creating and maintaining funding opportunities for historical, humanities, and social science research in Russian and Eurasian Studies in the United States.

Dan Davidson Received the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Slavic Languages and Literatures from Harvard University, and since 1983 he has held the rank of full professor in Russian and Second Language Acquisition at Bryn Mawr College. He is the author or editor of 26 books and more than 40 scholarly articles, including a 20-year longitudinal, empirical study of adult second language acquisition during study abroad. He has directed or co-directed 23 Ph.D. dissertations in the fields of Russian and second language acquisition. In 1992-95, Davidson also served as co-chairman of the Transformation of the Humanities and Social Sciences Initiative sponsored by the philanthropist George Soros. The program produced over 400 experimental textbooks for schools and colleges in Eurasia.

The exchange that took place on 17 June 2004 was an "electronic interview": we submitted questions by e-mail to Professor Davidson, and he sent us his responses.

Kritika: How would you describe the funding climate for Russian Studies in Washington today? Have the effects of "1991" been mitigated by the post 9/11 recognition of regional and linguistic expertise?

Dan Davidson Many of the post-9/11 U.S. government funding initiatives have been aimed at developing government-sector capacity and preparedness for the war on terrorism, with an obvious focus on the Arab-Muslim world. U.S. policymakers need to be reminded of the large and growing Muslim populations of the Russian Federation (11 million), Central Asia (45 million), Albania, Bosnia, and Herzegovina (4+ million), as well as the strategically important relationships that nearly all the post-Soviet nations represent for the United States today. In this connection, it is good to be able to report that Title VIII (Eurasian and East European Research and Training) was funded this past spring at the \$5 million level with special initiative to encourage research and language study focused on southeastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, including cross-border studies.

The National Endowment for Humanities will also continue its support of research and scholarly collaborations focused on Eastern Europe/Eurasia in the year ahead, with continuing grant support to individual scholars through the American Council for Teachers of Russian (ACTR) and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). Several pieces of legislation are

now in the works that could bring new support for study and work in our region in the years ahead: the late Senator Paul Simon championed a high-value exchange initiative intended to do no less than increase fivefold the number of American students who study abroad during their undergraduate years. Simon explicitly cited the 9/11 crisis as the imperative behind this initiative, known as the Lincoln Fellowships Program, which already has the support of a number of senior lawmakers.

Kritika: What do you think about the argument that Arabic-language and Middle Eastern Studies are to the "war on terrorism" what Russian Studies was to the Cold War? Does the boom in interest and funding for the study of the Arab world and Arabic have implications for our field? What about the current calls for congressional oversight of Title VI funds that are based on conservative criticism of Middle Eastern Studies?

Dan Davidson: Despite attempts in some quarters to establish "watchdog" oversight groups, the stream of funding that supports U.S. Ed. Title VI [of the Higher Education Act] centers around the country appears more or less stable. Title VI overall funding, as well as funding for Fullbright_Hays programs, was actually increased slightly in each of the past two funding years. I would expect it to remain more or less steady now for the coming funding cycle. Civilian and/or congressional oversight groups for federal programs are not inherently a bad idea. Many long-standing and respected advisory boards-such as the Board of Foreign Scholarships (Fullbright), the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and the National Security Education Program (NSEP) Advisory Boards-function well to provide private-sector oversight and advocacy for these federal programs without intruding into the grant-making process or the academic freedom of potential grantees. Many in the community hope that when the House and Senate conferees complete their work later this year on Title VI, either there will be no advisory board for Title VI, or a properly designed advisory structure such as the ones noted above will be crafted. For that to happen, however, readers of *Kritika* should keep informed about developments on Title VI and let their senators and congressmen know of their concerns.

In short, the immediate prospects for federal support of research and training in the Eurasian region are roughly similar to those of the past two year. One important exception is the loss from the Title VIII funding portfolio of the European Union accession countries, effective with the 2004 funding year.

On a more positive note, it is good to report that Russian remains on the U.S. government's short list of "strategic" (now called "investment" languages). An early but important by-product of this status is the inauguration this year under NSEP of the Russian National "Flagship Initiative" (alongside Arabic, Chinese, and Korean). The Flagship Initiative funds professional-level training in Russian open to graduate students and young professionals who have achieved at least a 2 or 2+ in speaking and reading Russian and who are prepared to train in-country to the 2, 3+ or 4 levels of professional proficiency. ACTR administers the new year-long program at St. Petersburg University and provides full fellowship support on a competitive basis. Flagship Fellowships have a government service requirement; Foreign Language and Area Studies, Title VIII, and other fellowships may also be used by qualified participants in the new program.

It has become increasingly clear, in the post-9/11 environment, that analysts and researchers in and outside of government cannot conduct fieldwork effectively without much higher-levels of professional language proficiency that was often the case in government in years past. It is also clear that Russian is a valuable language to know for analysts, scholars, third-sector personnel, and people in business focused on the Central Asian and South Caucasus regions.

Kritika: From your perspective at ACTR, what can you tell us about the health of Russian language study and the prospects for attracting the next generation in the Russian and Eurasian fields?

Dan Davidson: As your readers are well aware, Russian language enrollments today have returned pretty much to the levels we experience in the 1970s: about 24,000 students annually study the language in two- and four- year colleges, while another 6,000-8,000 are enrolled in school programs. The total number of adult learners of Russian studying privately or within government language schools (the Defense Language Institute, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Foreign Service Institute, etc.) can only be estimated but is probably in the four figure range if not five-figure.

Overall, language enrollments have stabilized since 1998 at the national level. While some programs have been reduced or canceled, some other have been introduced or expanded. What is more important than just head counts are certain changes and innovations now underway in the field, which stand to exert a positive influence in attracting young people to the study of the region, as well as in encouraging them to stay with their study of Russian over time.

First among these, I would cite the notable increase in interest in the formal study of Russian language, history, literature, and culture on the part of the Russian heritage community (which has increased fivefold in the United States over the past decade). Of similar importance to the field is the inauguration of a powerful new "feeder mechanism" for Russian in the U.S. educational system in the form of the first ever Russian Advanced Placement (AP) examination and of course for American high schools (beginning in 2005). The Russian AP program is a joint initiative of ACTR and the College Board, which has received development support from Title VI and NSEP. Finally, the Russian Flagship Program (see above) is at the end of the pipeline, as it were, to provide support and training for those who need the language at the highest levels. Taken together with the existing American support structure available in the Russian field for students and faculty (materials, contest, publications and online resources, study abroad, fellowships, faculty development, and research support), I think we can be optimistic and say with a certain confidence that the Russian field is well positioned to prepare an increasingly diverse generation of learners and students capable of integrating linguistic and regional expertise into a wide range of professional disciplines. I have not observed the same level of reliable support structures in the Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or Persian Studies fields that we in Russian and Eurasian Studies enjoy. The challenge is going to be to protect the developed field architecture that we currently have for the benefit of that new generation of students and scholars.