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98 Years After Youth Pledge, Indonesian Language Gains Traction Among Russian Youth

Moscow, Nov. 1, 2026 — Ninety-eight years after it was proclaimed as the language of unity, the Indonesian language is increasingly captivating young learners in Russia. In Moscow, approximately 140 students, academics, educators, and Indonesianists gathered for the Indonesian Language Congress at the Higher School of Economics University on Wednesday (Oct. 28).

This gathering forms part of an initiative by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to expand the global recognition and use of the Indonesian language.

For Vice Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Atip Latipulhayat, introducing Indonesian to the global community requires going beyond teaching vocabulary and grammar. The language must also find a place in academic discourse, diplomacy, international trade, and cultural exchange.

"The internationalization of the Indonesian language is not merely about increasing the number of learners, but also about elevating its function, prestige, and utility in global society," he stated during the congress, which was themed "The Indonesian Language on the Global Stage: Challenges, Opportunities, and the Future".

The official recognition of Indonesian as an official language of the UNESCO General Conference on Nov. 20, 2023, serves as a vital foundation. However, the broader task ahead lies in ensuring that the language is not only recognized but actively utilized across international forums and activities.

The government has established the 2025–2045 Roadmap for the Internationalization of the Indonesian Language. The Indonesian Language Internationalization Index rose from 51.44 in 2024 to 52.99 in 2025, with a target of 55.87 by 2029.

A primary gateway for this outreach is the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers program. As of October 2026, the program has reached 62 countries through 520 implementing institutions, engaging more than 234,000 active learners. In Russia, the initiative has gained strong traction through the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers classes at the Indonesian Embassy in Moscow, which currently enroll 149 students.

Vice Minister Atip noted that Russia holds immense potential as a strategic partner in developing the Indonesian language. Russia's robust academic tradition in linguistic, literary, and cultural studies provides a solid foundation for expanding student and faculty exchanges, collaborative research, the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers program, and the translation of literary works.

"Indonesian represents the national identity of our people, but it also serves as a bridge of friendship for the global community," he said.

The Indonesian language is hardly new to Russia. Indonesian Ambassador to the Russian Federation Jose Tavares noted that the teaching of the language at Moscow State University began in the late 1950s, and it is now also taught at the Higher School of Economics University.

Despite this long-standing history, Indonesian language education in Russia still faces challenges. These include a limited number of instructors, a shortage of learning materials tailored to Russian speakers, and the need for long-term program sustainability. Ambassador Jose expressed hope that the congress will yield concrete recommendations to address these hurdles while expanding the network of Indonesianists in Russia and Belarus.

Khoirul Rosyadi, the Education and Culture Attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in Moscow, announced that the congress will become an annual event. This second iteration brought together multiple generations of Russian Indonesianists, ranging from veteran scholars of Indonesian studies to current students.

Beyond panel discussions, a book exhibition for the Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers program introduced participants to various Indonesian learning materials. The atmosphere grew lively as Veronika Khomkina and Anastasia Marker performed the songs "Karena Kamu" and the traditional keroncong tune "Sapu Tangan".

From a classroom in Moscow to international platforms, the Indonesian language is embarking on a path vastly different from its origins 98 years ago. While it once began as a pledge to unite diverse ethnic groups across the archipelago, Indonesian now opens doors for the global community to experience the nation firsthand.

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