

## **Diverse People, Diverse Needs—Russia and the CIS Reading**

### **Russia's Government**

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia adopted a new constitution. This created a federal system, with a strong central government and local government units. In Russia, the president is head of the executive branch and the most powerful government leader. There is a two-house legislative branch that makes the laws and the highest court in Russia is the Constitutional Court. Russia's government is more democratic than that of the former Soviet Union. Like the United States—which also has a federal system—everyone 18 years and older can vote, and there are several political parties. However, the central government in Moscow still tries to control most levels of government. Moreover, those in power generally chose the people they want to be elected.

### **Changes in the CIS**

The fall of the Soviet Union brought about great changes in the lives and culture of the people in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are collectively known as the Caucasus. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are known as the Central Asian Republics. These countries are all a part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The Soviet Union did not allow religious freedom. However, since its fall, countries have built churches and mosques. They have also begun to celebrate religious festivals and holidays again.

### **Challenges Facing the CIS**

One challenge the people in this region face is making sure that different ethnic groups are treated fairly. Tajiks in Uzbekistan have a difficult time finding jobs, for instance. Sometimes ethnic differences can lead to fighting, as between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan. Some groups in the Caucasus have tried to break away and form separate countries.

Many people in this region are poor. Pollution has caused harm to both people and businesses, and cleaning up pollution requires a lot of money.

Another common problem in Central Asia and the Caucasus is the government. Most countries in the region are not democratic and authoritarian leaders who want to stay in power have limited people's freedoms in many countries. Government corruption has also made economic problems worse, as government officials steal money that should go to building the schools, hospitals, roads, and bridges needed for economic growth.

## Education in Russia and the CIS

The Soviet Union developed the educational system in the region to teach students how to live in a communist society. It focused on the Russian language and Soviet culture and ignored local languages and customs.

Today, some governments in the region are trying to change the educational system. They need to teach students how to live and succeed in a free market system. They are also trying to bring back local traditions in art, literature, and music. Teachers emphasize critical thinking and problem solving instead of memorizing facts, as in the old Soviet system. Some countries have built new universities, and Internet access allows students to be in touch with people in other countries. Not all countries in the region have taken these steps to the same extent, however.

<u>Changes</u>	<u>Challenges</u>

**THINK ABOUT IT:** How does the current Russian government compare to that of the former Soviet Union?

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Reading adapted from Contemporary World Cultures (Texas Ed.). Pearson Education, 2015; and "Russia's Government." National Geographic: World Cultures and Geography. (Texas Ed.). Cengage Learning, 2015.