

## Businesses will be restricted from using foreign words

On 28 February 2023, [amendments](#)\* to the Law on the State Language of Russia (the “**Language Law**”) came into force, restricting the use of foreign words in a number of key areas. Since then, all companies operating on the Russian market must comply with the new requirements for the layout of foreign language texts. Eventually, the use of foreign words not approved by “official” dictionaries may be banned.

### Essence of the amendments

The new version of the Language Law provides for the approval of a list of so-called normative dictionaries, normative reference books and normative grammars which will enshrine the norms of the modern Russian language. A similar list of dictionaries, reference books and grammars was approved earlier by [Order](#)\* No. 195 of the Russian Ministry of Education and Science dated 8 June 2009. However, at that time, there was no direct legislative obligation to follow corresponding rules. It is expected that, in light of the changes adopted, the government will revise and approve this list. According to [representatives](#)\* of the State Duma, the new list could be approved by 2025.

When the list is approved, officials of commercial and non-commercial organisations will have to comply with the rules set out in these dictionaries, reference books and grammars. In particular, the use of obscene language will be prohibited, as will the use of any foreign borrowings not included in the normative dictionaries as foreign words with no commonly used analogues in the Russian language.

Moreover, additions have been made to the Language Law concerning the requirements for the formatting of a text in Russian in the event that it is given as a translation of a foreign text. The rule providing for the text in a foreign language to be accompanied by a translation into Russian in areas in which the use of Russian is compulsory was previously contained in the Language Law. This law now specifies that such a text must be of equal layout and technical design, namely it must be in the same colour, type and font size as the text in the foreign language.

### Areas of application

The business areas that will be affected by the innovations include:

- advertising;
- mass media;
- cinemas;
- organisers of theatre, cultural and entertainment events;
- education.

In addition, two new provisions have been included in the Language Law which make the use of the Russian language obligatory for all organisations:

- in official dealings and correspondence with individuals;
- in information intended for consumers.

These rules effectively extend the requirements of the Language Law to companies in all fields of activity and can be applied to any information posted by companies on their websites or social media pages, in correspondence with customers, on product packaging, etc.

At the same time, the Language Law stipulates that in such spheres of activity as advertising, mass media, cinema shows, theatrical and other public performances, as well as when specifying information for consumers, the Russian language should be used, taking into account the specifics of activity in the respective spheres. This clause is supposed to soften the potentially negative effect of the Language Law on business activities and allow for deviations from the categorical rules of normative dictionaries and reference books in certain cases, but the real content of this norm will come out in law enforcement practice.

It should be noted that the novelties will not affect the use of registered trademarks and trade names that are excluded from the relevant regulation by virtue of a direct indication in the Language Law.

### Liability

There is currently no legislation providing for any liability for non-compliance with the Language Law and no supervisory body has been appointed to monitor compliance.

It is expected that relevant rules will be introduced into legislation once normative dictionaries, reference books and grammars have been approved.

### Recommendations

In connection with the adopted amendments, we recommend that companies operating in Russia monitor the news on the government’s approval of normative dictionaries, reference books and grammars. To ensure a smoother transition to the new regulation, companies directly affected by the amendments should already start to minimise the use of foreign words in their operations today.

It should be taken into account that regulations specifying technical requirements for the layout of text in Russian accompanying foreign-language inscriptions are already applicable. Companies are therefore advised to review their advertising and information materials, websites and other resources for consumers and adjust them accordingly.

We also recommend monitoring the fate of a similar [bill](#)\* banning the use of so-called non-Cyrillic alphabets in advertising. Although the bill has been criticised by many lawmakers and representatives of the advertising market, it has not yet been withdrawn from consideration.

We will keep track of these and other changes and keep you informed of further developments.

\* *In Russian*

For further information, please email the authors or your usual contact at our firm.

## Authors



**Anton Bankovskiy**  
Partner  
Head of Intellectual Property  
E [anton.bankovskiy@seamless.legal](mailto:anton.bankovskiy@seamless.legal)



**Alisa Mikheeva**  
Associate  
Intellectual Property  
E [alisa.mikheeva@seamless.legal](mailto:alisa.mikheeva@seamless.legal)

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