

# CYRILLIC ALPHABET

## THE THIRD OFFICIAL ALPHABET OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

**The interview with Assoc. Prof. Dr Emilia Velikova, University of Ruse  
was conducted by Mrs. Veska Uzunova**



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emiliya Velikova is Erasmus+ and CEEPUS coordinator, researcher, lecturer in the fields of Education, Mathematics Education, Mathematics; Head of the GeoGebra Institute of Ruse, former Faculty Vice Dean; coordinator of 2 master's degree courses in Education and Information Technologies, supervisor of PhDs; author/co-author/editor of 17 books and 141 papers; editorial board member of 3 education journals; plenary lecturer of many international conferences and congresses on education; visiting lecturer to many universities in Europe; Vice president of DANET, Board member of the International Group on Mathematical Creativity and Giftedness.

**We know that before the Cyrillic alphabet existed, the Glagolitic alphabet was created, which is no longer used in Europe. What about the Glagolitic alphabet?**The Glagolitic script (known as Glagolitsa) is the oldest reported Slavic alphabet.

It is believed that it was created in the 9th century by Cyril (Constantin Philosopher). He and his brother, Methodius, were from the elite of the Bulgarian Slavs and the sons of a rich merchant from Thessaloniki. The two brothers were invited by King Rostislav, the king of South Bulgarian Moravia. They were sent by the Byzantine Emperor Michael III in 863 for the purpose of spreading Christianity among the West Slavs in the area. The brothers decided to translate church books into what is now known as Old Church Slavonic, which was understandable to the ordinary people. Since it was not easy to transcribe the words of that language by using the existing Greek or Latin alphabets, Cyril decided to invent a new, Glagolitic script based on the local dialect of the Slavic tribes, which he knew very well from his mother. The two brothers quickly created many prayers, chants, dogmatic writings, and translations. They taught many students, the best of whom were Clement, Nahum, Angelarius, Gorazd and Sava. After the death of King Rostislav and the death of Cyril, Latin was used there again, because these lands were separated from the Bulgarian Empire and were annexed to France.

## **What is the connection between the Glagolitic alphabet and the Cyrillic alphabet?**

The Glagolitic alphabet is the basis on which the Cyrillic alphabet was created - so named in honour of Cyril.

After the deaths of Cyril and Methodius, their disciples Clement, Nahum, Angelarius, Gorazd and Sava returned to Bulgaria. They were asked by King Boris I (Boris-Michael), the king of the First Bulgarian Empire to teach the clergy students of the state in the Slavic language and Glagolitsa, recognized by Pope Hadrian II.

Boris I created exceptional conditions for work and life of students in the centres of Pliska and Ohrid. But he wanted a new alphabet that was even easier to learn, read and write.

The Glagolitic alphabet was a primary example for the Cyrillic alphabet which was created by many specialists in Preslav - the capital of Bulgaria. The original Cyrillic alphabet has 44 letters for 44 sounds of the local old Bulgarian language. It included 12 Glagolitic letters which corresponded to sounds specific to the Old Bulgarian language. They did not exist in the Greek alphabet and language. 24 letters of the Greek alphabet were also taken and 8 new letters were created. The current Cyrillic alphabet includes 30 letters.

## **Tell us some impressive facts about the Cyrillic alphabet!**

- 1) Our ancestors started celebrating the 24th May (the national day of Bulgarian Script and Culture) more than two hundred years ago.
- 2) In the original version of the Cyrillic alphabet devised by St. Clement of Ohrid there are 44 letters for the 44 sounds unlike the 30 letters of the current alphabet.
- 3) The earliest Cyrillic inscription found on Bulgarian territory dates back to the year 931 and it is in a cave monastery near the village of Krepcha.
- 4) The name "Cyrillic" was registered in 1563 in the Croatian translation of the New Testament.
- 5) Nowadays the Cyrillic alphabet is used by 400 million people worldwide. Except in Bulgaria, the Cyrillic is an official alphabet in Byelorussia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, Northern Macedonia, Mongolia, Montenegro, Russia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and until 2018 in Kazakhstan. Several decades ago, the Cyrillic alphabet was used in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan.
- 6) The Cyrillic was also used in Romania until the late 70s of the XIX century.
- 7) In 2007, the Cyrillic alphabet became the third official alphabet of the European Union after the Latin and Greek alphabet.
- 8) Analysing the contribution of King Boris I and of the Bulgarian state, the French linguist Roger Bernard summarises, "Preserving the work of St. Cyril and St. Methodius, Bulgaria deserves the gratitude and respect not only of the Slavic peoples, but also of the whole world. And it will remain like this as long as mankind invests in the true meaning of the words 'progress, culture and humanity' ..."
- 9) For several years, Hitler repeatedly exerted pressure on the Bulgarian government to abolish the Cyrillic alphabet and accept Latin as the official alphabet.

- 10) And even if it is not a scientific fact but rather an ascertainment, around the world the Cyrillic alphabet is wrongly known as the “Russian alphabet”, an injustice probably due to the prosaic reason that the Russian people outnumber all other nations using it.