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Education Reform in Russia

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Abstract

Recent reforms have muddled the Russian education system. They have added bureaucracy, reduced state funding, and threatened to dramatically cut the number of professors. Combined with the radical restructuring of the Academy of Sciences, the changes amount to an assault on the Russian intelligentsia, which so far has been powerless to push back against the onslaught.

Losing the Soviet Legacy

Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, the extensive and effective system of education and scientific research built during the Soviet era has suffered hard times. This educational colossus once stood as a proud accomplishment of Communist rule. Now the underfinancing of the 1990s combined with the ever-increasing bureaucratic burden imposed since 2000 has dropped the system into decay and disrepair.

Unintended Consequences of the Bologna Reforms

Ten years ago, in October 2003, Russia joined the all-European Bologna process, which sought to unify the requirements and approaches to higher education across all European universities. The reforms led to the establishment of two levels of higher education, the bachelor and master's programs, which replaced the previous 5-year "specialist" degrees. At the same time, the Russian system retained its two-tier post-graduate education in the form of the Candidate of Sciences (roughly, a PhD equivalent) and advanced Doctoral degree (close to the German Habilitation required for a Full Professor's position).

In general terms, the new system should resemble the American model, with 4+2 years of education. However, the hybrid that the reform produced led Russian universities to combine too many features of the old "specialist" education with the new 4+2 division producing the result that the bachelor's degree does not really offer a general higher education, but a truncated specialist course of study. After that, the MA level is a strange addition with no practical value for the student. Since many young people at that age have started to work and MA programs cannot provide them with jobs, salaries, or stipends to finance their living expenses, few young people choose to pursue a master's degree.

However, the universities are now funded by the state depending on the number of students they enroll, and that means that the university bureaucracy does not permit any student to be expelled. A professor would have to devote a lot of energy and aggravation to remove a bad student, so few instructors choose to do so. Allow-

ing such low performers to stay in the system is another blow to the quality of the education system and the results that it delivers.

Added Bureaucracy

The "return of the state" since 2000 revived and increased bureaucratic controls over every aspect of life in Russia. In the universities, the new trend meant rapid growth in the number and complexity of the forms that professors must complete, and the quantity of reports they must file with different levels of the administration. Every single course of lectures a professor teaches now must be accompanied by a 200-page document describing the content of the course, its place in the overall curriculum, as well as explaining the links of each topic to the "competencies" that the course develops in the students. "Quality control procedures" introduced in many Russian universities following the recommendations of the Bologna process in practice mean additional levels of oversight for the paperwork, as well as detailed and regular checks examining the general coherence of the paperwork, which often has little relationship to the real life problems of teaching or research.

Another source of bureaucratic pressure came from an attempt by the state to distinguish between "good" and "bad" universities. In order to sort the one from the other, the Ministry invented many criteria and required every university to report the extent to which it complied with these benchmarks. Within the university, the new demands produced a nightmare of internal bureaucracy, requiring the faculty to produce reports on the "number of small enterprises" they founded, level of salaries their graduates earned, the quantity of foreign students they attracted, and numerous other indicators. The rational requirement for publications in good peer-reviewed journals in many cases was accompanied with a demand to list non-existent or hard-to-find bibliographic details for old publications (such as their DOI numbers).

Relatively low salaries, the heavy bureaucratic burden and never-ending reforms repelled talented young people from pursuing academic careers in Russia, leading to a further deterioration of the education system.

Ranking Universities

For several years, the Russian government tried to impose a hierarchy of universities on the institutions that had once been largely indistinguishable. Two universities—Moscow State and St. Petersburg State—received special statuses; several big universities (mostly in the capitals of the federal districts) were enlarged at the expense of the smaller institutions in surrounding areas, and received the title of “Federal Universities.” Then, many universities received the rank of “National Research Universities.” Each of these was entitled to special funding, but so far there is no evidence that they perform any better than their peers. The newly elevated universities were unable to attract new faculty or better students because of the low mobility of the population in Russia, and consequently did not improve their performance.

The latest attempt at differentiation was a competition that the state organized for universities that wanted to achieve a top spot in the world university rankings. The idea was to choose 15 Russian universities and provide them with additional funding in order to help them break into the international top 100. Russian academics criticized the idea because it diverted resources away from mid-level institutions and created “Potemkin villages” in the higher education system, but the project is still being implemented.

Burst of Reform

An explosion of reforms announced by the Russian government in the education sphere in late 2012 interrupted this slow motion deterioration of the system. First, on December 20, the government issued a new State Program on the “Development of Science and Technologies”; then, on December 30 Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev approved a road map of “changes in the social sphere aimed at increasing the efficiency of education and science.” Finally, on December 31, President Vladimir Putin signed into law a new piece of legislation entitled “On Education” that went into effect on September 1, 2013.¹

Russia’s professors quickly discovered that the Road Map provided for a 44 percent cut in jobs at Russian universities over the course of five years. Partially, the cuts are explained by the demographic situation since there will be fewer college-aged youths in the coming

years. But the document also raises the student-professor ratio from 9.4 to 12. In absolute figures, this change means firing almost 140,000 professors from the current approximately 318,000.

The promise that Putin made to double professor salaries during his presidential election campaign and repeated immediately after his return to the Kremlin was now universally understood to be an attempt to cut the number of positions in order to increase salaries without increasing total funding for higher education.

This realization led to numerous protests, loud journalistic investigations, and the creation of an independent trade union for university professors called “University Solidarity.”² The indignation in the university collectives did not alter the ministry’s decision, and the summer enrollment campaign witnessed severe cuts in the number of state-funded places in universities throughout the country. However, the social norm in Russia now requires that almost everyone receive a college education, and parents preferred to pay the tuition costs so that their children can matriculate to university. Accordingly, the immediate result of the government’s new policy was to force parents to pay tuition rather than reduce the number of professor positions.

Still, there were several purely bureaucratic ways to protect jobs, for example, eliminating part time jobs could count as abolishing a full time position. Those professors who worked part-time were either fired or given full positions in the departments. The normal workload also increased—while work requirements are set by the university, the ratio of students to professors is decided in Moscow, and the funding goes along with those figures.

Attack on the Academy of Sciences

In the midst of the student enrollment campaign, the government struck another blow, this time against the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). New legislation introduced on June 27, 2013, provided for the radical reform of the oldest scientific organization in Russia by reassigning research institutes from reporting to the Academy to a newly established federal agency, created from the merger of the RAS and two professional branch academies—the Russian Academy of Medical Science and the Russian Academy of Agriculture.

Scientists protested. Academicians took to the streets and picketed the State Duma, while seventy members of the Academy signed a declaration refusing to join the new “academy”. Famous scholars organized support from all over the world, and slowed the legislation; the final reading was postponed until September. However, even the all-Academy protest demonstrations,

1 Podpisan zakon ob obrazovanii, December 31, 2012 <http://kremlin.ru/news/17251>; Ob utverzhenii plana meropriyatii (“dorozhnoi karty”) “Izmeneniya v otraslyakh sotsialnoi sfery, napravlennye na povyshenie effektivnosti obrazovaniya i nauki.” Rasporyazhenie ot 30 dekabrya 2012 g. No. 2620-r <http://government.ru/docs/3391>; Ob utverzhenii gosudarstvennoi programmy “Razvitiye nauki i tekhnologii”. Rasporyazhenie ot 20 dekabrya 2012 g. No. 2433-r <http://government.ru/docs/3346>

2 <http://unisolidarity.ru/>

petitions, and maneuvering by the recently elected president of the Academy Vladimir Fortov failed to save the cause; on September 27 Vladimir Putin signed the law and the Russian Academy of Sciences ceased to exist in its traditional form.

Conclusion

All these events produced wide-spread indignation within the academic community, both in universities and research institutes, but demonstrated that the scholars had no leverage or political influence. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation was the only

Duma party that protested against the law (and thus won additional esteem from the academics), but that was a lost cause.

At this point, the Russian academic community is suffering under attack from the state and has little hope of emerging victorious. However, this is the first time that academics are beginning to build real horizontal structures that can offer some kind of resistance and attract the sympathy of the public. The current regime is no longer afraid to reveal itself as an anti-intellectual force in Russian life, but such a tactic will eventually backfire.

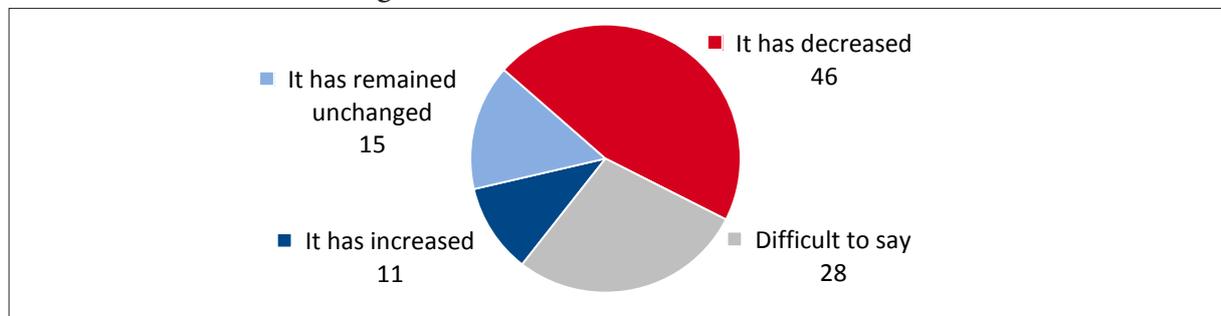
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OPINION POLL

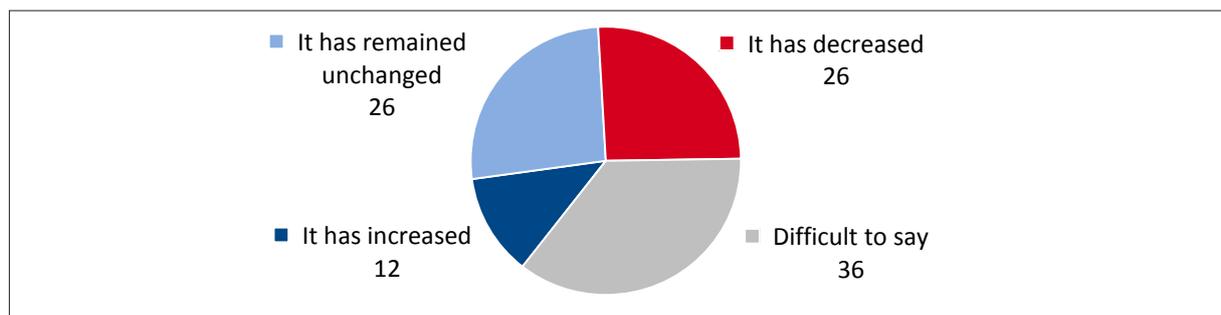
The Academy of Sciences in the Eyes of Russian Citizens

Figure 1: What Do You Think—Has the Authority of the Academy Increased, Decreased or Remained Unchanged Since Soviet Times?



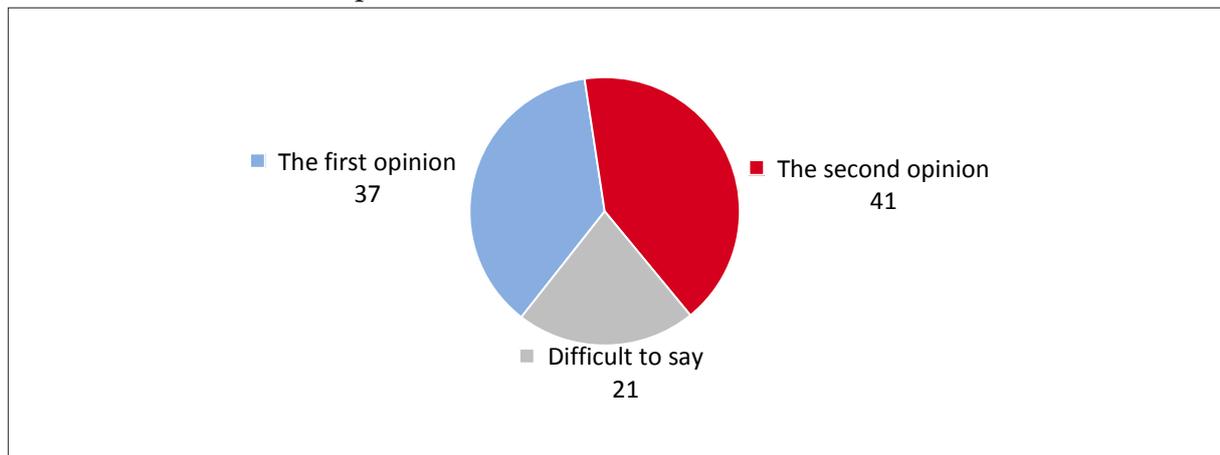
Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (Fond Obshchestvogo Mneniya), N = 1500, 25–26 May 2013, <http://fom.ru/obshchestvo/10943>

Figure 2: Has the Authority of the Academy Increased, Decreased or Remained Unchanged in the Last Two or Three Years?



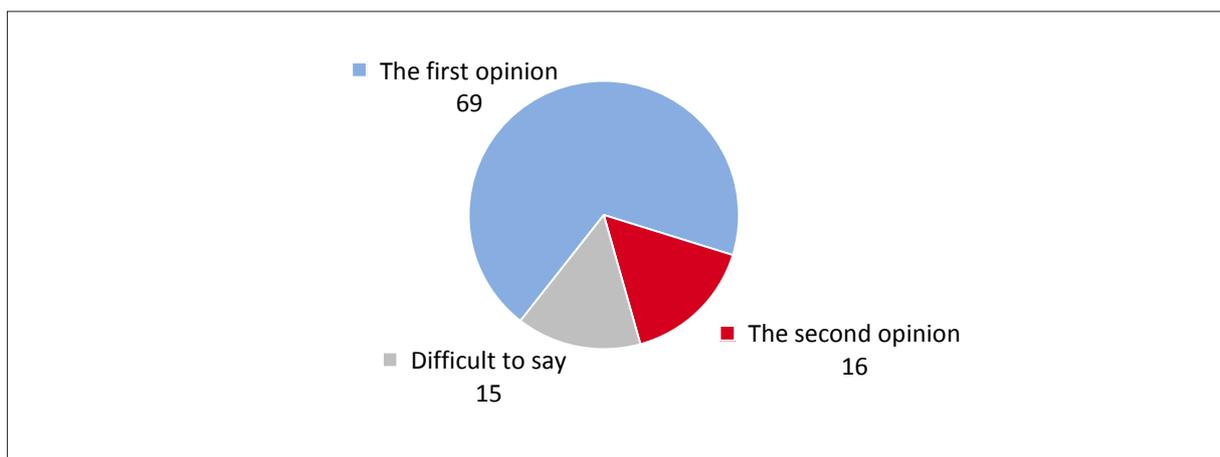
Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (Fond Obshchestvogo Mneniya), N = 1500, 25–26 May 2013, <http://fom.ru/obshchestvo/10943>

Figure 3: Some People Think That the Academy of Sciences Should Define Its Main Tasks and Areas of Research by Itself; Other People Think the State Should Define the Main Tasks and Areas of Research of the Academy of Sciences. Which Point of View is Closer to Your Opinion—the First or the Second?



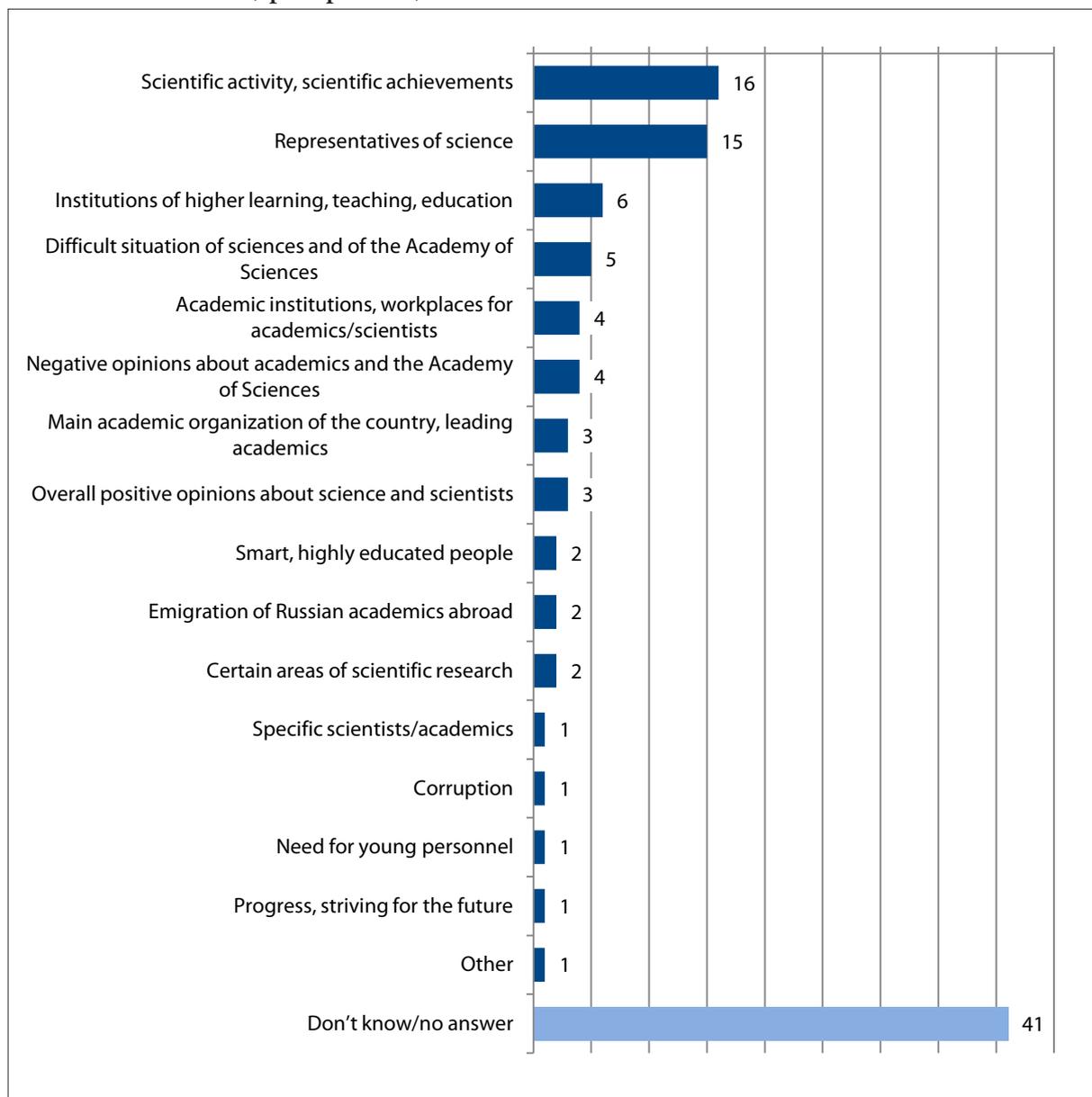
Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (Fond Obshchestvogo Mneniya), N = 1500, 25–26 May 2013, <http://fom.ru/obshchestvo/10943>

Figure 4. In the Near Future, the President of the Russian Academy of Sciences Will Be Elected. Some People Think That the Head of the Academy of Sciences Should Be a Distinguished Academic; Others Think the President of the Academy of Sciences Should Be a Good Administrator and Manager. Which Point of View is Closer to Your Opinion—the First or the Second?



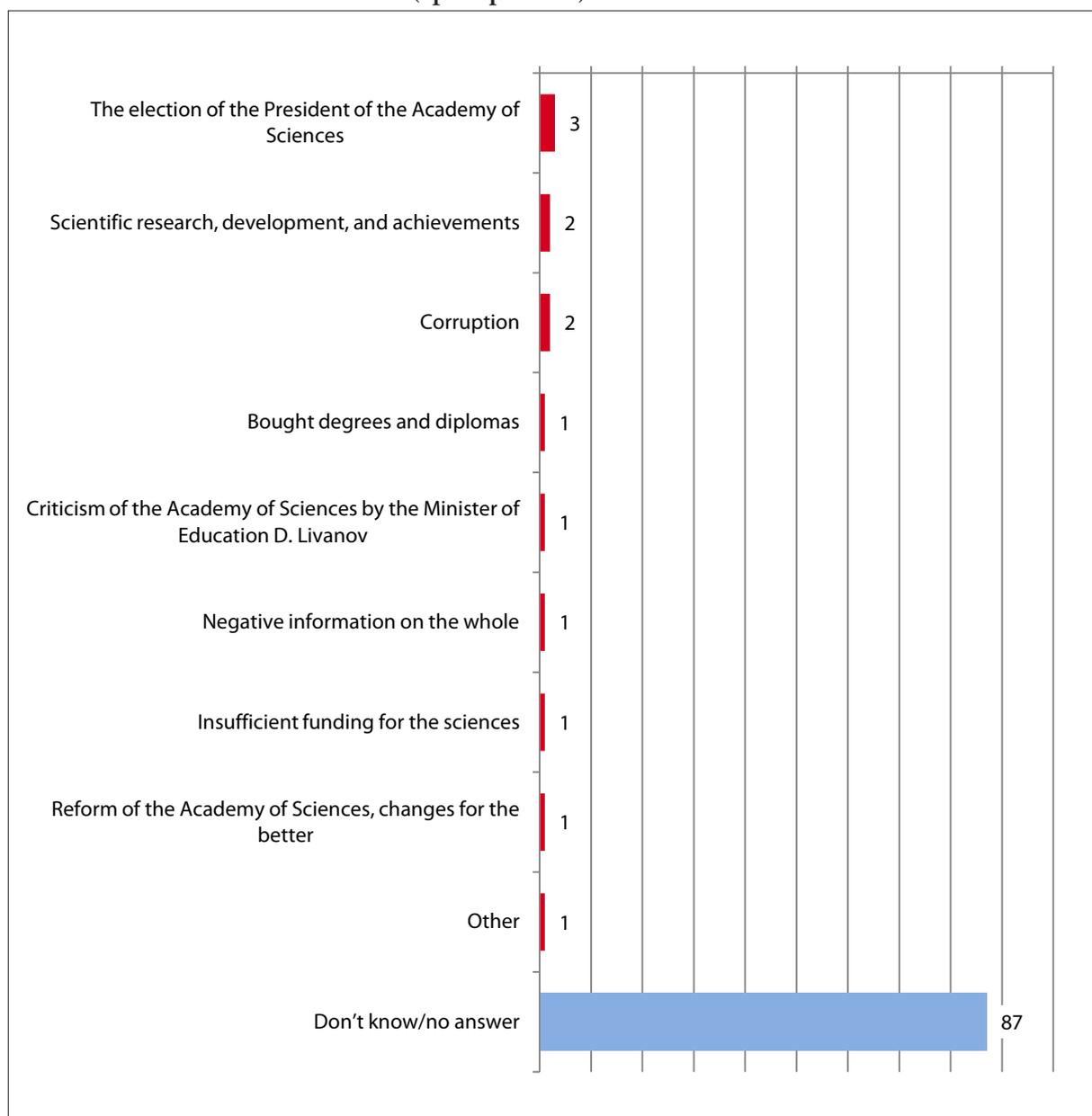
Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (Fond Obshchestvogo Mneniya), N = 1500, 25–26 May 2013, <http://fom.ru/obshchestvo/10943>

Figure 5: What Do You Think of Most of All When You Hear the Words “Russian Academy of Sciences”? (open question)



Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (Fond Obshchestvogo Mneniya), N = 1500, 25–26 May 2013, <http://fom.ru/obshchestvo/10943>

Figure 6: If You Encountered Information on the Academy of Sciences in Newspapers, the Radio or Television or Internet Mass Media Within the Last Month or Two—What Was this Information About? (open question)



Source: representative opinion poll by the Public Opinion Fund (Fond Obshchestvogo Mneniya), N = 1500, 25–26 May 2013, <http://fom.ru/obshchestvo/10943>

Russian Companies and Higher Education

By Tatiana Kastueva-Jean, Paris

Abstract

During the period of transition from Soviet to market economy, Russian companies became profoundly disinterested in cooperation with universities. This trend is reversing progressively under the influence of two factors: firstly, a lack of highly skilled personnel in the country and, secondly, the higher education reforms initiated by the Government since the mid-2000s.

Historical Background

In Soviet times, the relationship between universities and companies was relatively close. It was organized essentially around three axes: work placements during studies, company sponsorship for some students with a guarantee of their recruitment (*tseleviki*) and imposed appointments of all graduates for an obligatory three-year period. As part of the general plan, the number of specialists trained in each field was determined “from below” by industries in the different economic sectors. Several universities were under the direct control of their respective branch ministries.

Universities were primarily places of learning, while fundamental research was mainly carried out in the system of the USSR Academy of Sciences, applied research and development (R&D) was undertaken in special institutes subordinated to the technical ministries. Thus, education, R&D and production were compartmentalized. However, there was one notable exception to this rule: the “common chairs” (*bazovye kafedry*). There was close cooperation between some engineering schools with an Academy of Sciences research institute, an industrial company or an engineering and design office, which developed prototypes mainly for the military-industrial complex. This form of cooperation emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War due to shortages of skilled labor and the development of new economic sectors, such as nuclear and space. “Common chairs” existed, for example, at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology and at the Bauman Institute. The best graduates could pursue a research career in partner institutes and laboratories.

After the demise of the USSR, Russian companies lost interest in cooperating with universities. Employers criticized universities for their disconnection from economic reality, outdated teaching methods and low quality of graduates. According to the Levada Center’s polls from successive years during this period, the level of training of young graduates was frequently judged to be insufficient by employers. Disappointed by the traditional higher-education system, the biggest public and private companies (Severstal, Lukoil, RusHydro, Gazprom, RusAl) preferred to invest in internal training systems (“corporate universities”).

However, since the mid-2000s the centrifugal trend is gradually reversing under the influence of two main factors: the lack of qualified labor and the reforms initiated by the Government in the field of higher education. This obvious trend, however, has limits.

Lack of Qualified Labor

All polls and studies show that Russian firms consider the lack of qualified labor to be one of the most important risks for business, along with bureaucratic complexity and corruption. Competition between companies for labor is increasing due to demographic pressures: according to the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), the working population fell by more than 2.7 million people between 2008 and 2012. As for the younger generation, the number of those aged between 14 and 19 years, for example, decreased during the same period from 10.5 million to 7.6 million.

This situation is a challenge for all national sectors: the military, universities and businesses. It explains growing competition between companies to “capture” young candidates as soon as possible (sometimes, during their second or third year of study). Cooperation with universities in undergraduate training (with a possible recruitment later) is becoming more common. For example, about thirty students from the Technical University of Lipetsk are granted a scholarship every year by Vladimir Lisin, the general director of the steel company NLMK: winners have priority in company recruitment programs and NLMK currently employs about 120 alumni.

Until recently, it was rare to see Russian employers participate directly in the design of university programs and creation of new curricula. Today, there has undoubtedly been progress in this area, even if the path is not easy: university rectors see this trend as the “insidious privatization” of universities. In 2009, the Moscow State University of Steel and Alloys (MISiS) and the Unified Metallurgical Company (OMK) created a two-year Master of “Cooperative Learning” program for engineers. Students spend half of their time at the company and each student has two tutors, a teacher from MISiS and a representative of OMK. The company can influence the

content of the program according to its needs and also has the ability to check the quality of training directly.

Trilateral contracts between the university, company and student, as well as “common chairs” are making a triumphant return. The latter now cover not only the traditional industrial sectors, but also high-tech companies. Thus, Yandex has opened two “common chairs,” at Bauman University and the Higher School of Economics. Another example is that, since 2011, the CEO of the state corporation Rosnano, Anatoly Chubais, has been in charge of a newly created chair of Technological Entrepreneurship at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology: its aim is to train young researchers in applied mathematics and physics, and teach them to develop and commercialize the results of their research.

Large public companies, such as Gazprom, Rosneft and Rosatom are becoming more active in cooperation with universities in their specialist areas. For example, Gazprom finances the Gubkin University of Oil and Gas and other universities in the hydrocarbon sector. This involves grants and scholarships bearing the company name for students, PhD candidates or junior faculty members; equipment for conference rooms, laboratories and libraries etc. Universities are very fond of these “strategic partnerships” with big sponsors that both improve their financial situation and increase their prestige. Some of these companies are calling for the return of imposed appointments of graduates as was the case in Soviet times. Such a proposal was made by some deputies of the State Duma, but this idea was rejected in August 2013 by Vladimir Putin as unrealistic in a market economy.

The case of the cooperation between the state corporation for the nuclear sector, Rosatom, and the National Nuclear University (MIFI) is special. In exchange for financial support from Rosatom, MIFI and its branches in the regions are becoming Rosatom’s major, even exclusive suppliers of manpower, displacing other technical institutions. *De facto*, Rosatom has assimilated the University within its structure, but this kind of “integrated cooperation” remains unique.

Other initiatives are less directly “interested” and come close to corporate patronage. Through their private foundations, some Russian “oligarchs,” such as Vladimir Potanin (Norilsk Nickel) and Oleg Deripaska (RusAl), are actively involved in charitable activities designed to support higher education. These are not linked to the business needs of the companies in question, but improve higher education in general and create better conditions for students. In this context, it should be noted that Russian companies do not benefit from tax exemptions when they fund studies.

Other notable changes can be observed. For example, professionals are now more often invited to lecture

at universities or to sit on exam boards. Representatives of companies are now part of the supervisory boards at universities that have autonomous status (for example, all federal universities), although the role of these councils still remains limited.

Foreign companies in Russia are fully aware of the issues and contribute to original projects (such as the proposal to create a university for the automotive sector in the free economic zone of Kaluga).

Pressure from Public Authorities and Sector Reforms

Since 2004–2005, the Russian government has encouraged the integration of education, R&D and innovation. In line with global trends, a new model of higher education is advocated, which is centered on developing a full cycle of innovation in universities, from basic research to marketing of the final innovative products. The model often cited by Russian authorities is Stanford University and Silicon Valley. During his electoral campaign, in January 2012, Vladimir Putin declared that “restoring the innovative nature of the economy should begin with universities—which should be seen as both centers for fundamental science and resources for innovative people.” In addition to the economic benefits at the national level, this would ensure Russia a better position in international university rankings and therefore would increase its part on the global market for educational services and improve its international image.

Between 2006 and 2011, about forty universities were selected on a competitive basis with the explicit aim of establishing this model. These “national research universities” and “federal universities” have received substantial public funding and have ambitious development programs, which include many quantitative indicators for R&D and innovation.

For their part, Russian companies are also under pressure: the term “obligation to innovate” is even used. Fifty major companies (Gazprom, Rosneft, Russian Railways, Aeroflot) had to adopt innovative development programs up to 2015, including mandatory cooperation with universities in various forms: joint research, shared laboratories, etc. Directors for innovation were appointed in these companies as well as in universities.

In 2010, in order to promote integration between education and research, the government launched a tender (“Government Decree 218”) that proposes to co-finance 50% of R&D, if the company collaborates with a university. This approach is unprecedented in Russia: the Russian State assumes a part of the risk, simultaneously stimulating both demand for R&D and its supply. A total of 158 projects are currently being funded, representing more than 28 billion rubles (700 million

euros) of the federal budget.

Financial reasons explain the government's promotion of university-industry cooperation. According to the OECD, in Russia only 8% of higher education funding comes from companies, with the majority being provided by the federal budget (64.6%) and households (27.4%). The contribution of the State is close to the average of OECD countries (70%), but the situation is different in the United States (38.1% from the State, 45.3% from households and 16.6 % from companies), whose model inspires the Russian government. Private capital is expected to play an increased role, thereby reducing the burden on the public budget. While they are undoubtedly generous, all recent public tenders for universities require a contribution (of 20 to 50%) from their own funds (coming from companies, regional authorities, the sale of the products of university R&D, etc.). Pushed in this direction, many regional universities now conduct annual surveys of the expectations and the economic needs of regional businesses. The most prestigious have established endowments and alumni networks.

Limits of cooperation

The financial crisis of 2008–2009 led many companies to scale down their plans for cooperation with universities: according to a recent survey by the Levada Center, the proportion of companies that cooperate with universities fell between 2008 and 2012 from 44% to 33%. In the wake of the crisis, the situation is gradually improving and returning to the 2008 level, but the growth in cooperation is largely due to the “passive” forms that require less financial investment by the companies (participation of companies in “open days”, “job fairs”, etc).

If cooperation in initial training seems to be developing naturally and corresponds to the needs of both parties, R&D cooperation encounters more problems, despite pressure from the government. Due to the legacy of the Soviet era (separation between research and teaching) and transition period (under-funding and brain drain both abroad and into other domestic sectors), the level of research in universities is weak and there is a lack of skills to meet the needs of businesses. The Russian Academy of Sciences is often excluded from public tenders for universities.

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Cooperation on R&D often has a formal character. The hidden goal of both partners is to gain access to public funding and their minds are often far from the declared goal (to bring closer teaching and research). It is rarely a truly common research project, conducted jointly by the company and the university research unit, whose results would be systematically integrated into teaching. For companies, it is an opportunity of “outsourcing” funded in part with public money. Thus, the formal criteria of R&D development in universities can be met, but the spirit of reforms is not respected. In fact, the division between teaching and research/innovation persists; even when it comes to salary calculations in universities, teaching and research are counted separately.

As noted earlier, universities intend to become a link between fundamental science and industry and they are active in this field by creating business-incubators; technological parks; centers of intellectual property, expertise and certification; and start-ups. However, few innovations in universities are really competitive; the innovative character of their products and services is sometimes questionable, while the annual turnover of start-ups is negligible.

Finally, one should note the important role of the State in fostering such cooperation through public financially attractive tenders. The deliberate policy of the State in the sector is subject to multiple interpretations in Russia. For some, it is justified and there is no alternative to this impetus from the top. For others, there is a risk of dependence upon budgetary resources that could be detrimental to the natural development of horizontal links.

The rapprochement between universities and enterprises in Russia is part of a global trend, observed in both developed and emerging countries, which consists of developing R&D in universities, raising funds from companies, etc. This approach has progressively been accepted by the majority of the social partners in Russia and is now perceived as a better way to meet the challenges of the modern economy and the globalized world. There is an understanding that universities and businesses increasingly need to build lasting relationships to increase their attractiveness and competitive advantage. However, more efficient national models of interaction have yet to be invented.

ABOUT THE RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Ortung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder, Aglaya Snetkov

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Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen

Founded in 1982, the Research Centre for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen is dedicated to the interdisciplinary analysis of socialist and post-socialist developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The major focus is on the role of dissent, opposition and civil society in their historic, political, sociological and cultural dimensions.

With a unique archive on dissident culture under socialism and with an extensive collection of publications on Central and Eastern Europe, the Research Centre regularly hosts visiting scholars from all over the world.

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The Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich

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In its teaching capacity, the CSS contributes to the ETH Zurich-based Bachelor of Arts (BA) in public policy degree course for prospective professional military officers in the Swiss army and the ETH and University of Zurich-based MA program in Comparative and International Studies (MACIS); offers and develops specialized courses and study programs to all ETH Zurich and University of Zurich students; and has the lead in the Executive Masters degree program in Security Policy and Crisis Management (MAS ETH SPCM), which is offered by ETH Zurich. The program is tailored to the needs of experienced senior executives and managers from the private and public sectors, the policy community, and the armed forces.

The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), and in cooperation with partner institutes manages the Crisis and Risk Network (CRN), the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security (PHP), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Russian and Eurasian Security (RES) Network.

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The Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies is home to a Master's program in European and Eurasian Studies, faculty members from political science, history, economics, sociology, anthropology, language and literature, and other fields, visiting scholars from around the world, research associates, graduate student fellows, and a rich assortment of brown bag lunches, seminars, public lectures, and conferences.

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The University of Zurich, founded in 1833, is one of the leading research universities in Europe and offers the widest range of study courses in Switzerland. With some 24,000 students and 1,900 graduates every year, Zurich is also Switzerland's largest university. Within the Faculty of Arts, the Institute of History consists of currently 17 professors and employs around a 100 researchers, teaching assistants and administrative staff. Research and teaching relate to the period from late antiquity to contemporary history. The Institute offers its 2,600 students a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in general history and various specialized subjects, including a comprehensive Master's Program in Eastern European History. Since 2009, the Institute also offers a structured PhD-program. For further information, visit at <http://www.hist.uzh.ch/>

Resource Security Institute

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