

End of internationalization?

Russian science and higher education

The upheavals that have been happening to the Russian scientific world since the outbreak of the war have already led to a catastrophic decline of Russian higher education and science in the era of the beginning of the Cold War. This ties into a longer prehistory of the restructuring of the Russian education system, as Dmitry Dubrovskiy traces.

Already from 2011 to 2012, the course towards the development of Russian science and higher education looked schizophrenic: the active promotion of international scientific projects, including mega-science ones, and the internationalization of higher education, have been combined with the fight against »foreign influence«, the search for spies and »pro-American influence groups« in universities. The war put an end to such a dual policy. The iron curtain being erected for Russian science and education is actively supported from two sides: in Russia with the help of the only remaining logic of »mobilization of national science«, and on the part of Western democracies – by an academic boycott.

Russian science and higher education 2014–2022

Leaders of new independent Russia – as a country, succeeded Soviet Union – always underly the role and importance of the higher education and science in the country development – and low level of academic freedom.¹ At the time of economic stability and restoration of economics and social order (mostly because of high oil prices, which has been coincided with Putin's terms), the rhetoric formula of this state narrative – »to support for higher education and science« has been adjusted by real investments. But follow the logic of authoritarian modernization, these investments have been combined with serious constrains of university autonomy and

constrain of academic rights and freedoms.

The political rivalry of 2011–2012 (above all, protests electoral fraud in Russia) and the time of Putin's »return« to the presidency of Russia marked the beginning of a conservative turn in Russian foreign and domestic policy.² This turn directly affected not only Russia's domestic but also foreign policy, strengthened authoritarian tendencies in the country and led to a political adventure – the annexation of Crimea and Russia's involvement in a hybrid war with Ukraine. This policy directly influenced both the activity of Russia in the field of internationalization of science and higher education, and the degree of its involvement in this process.

Since 2014, according to the »Globalization of Science« index, Russia's role in international science and education begins to decrease: by 2019, the index, which shows the degree of participation of Russian science in the global market, becomes noticeably lower than that of developed countries and even than that of BRICS member countries.³

At the same time, the anti-American and anti-European trends in foreign policy have noticeably intensified, which could not but affect the situation with science and higher education in Russia. The fact is that the very development of Russian science and higher education was largely due to American and Western European support: suffice it to recall the huge role that the Soros Foundation played in supporting desperately needed science and education in the 90s.⁴ A direct break with the previous



policy (and simply fantastic ingratitude) was the recognition of the Soros Foundation in Russia in 2015 as an »undesirable organization«⁵.

Foreign sources of funding, which in themselves were proof of the presence of international projects, began to decline since the Crimea annexation, including through the closure of several programs implemented by foreign and international organizations. This was due not only to the growth of political xenophobia of the ruling regime, but also to the Western sanctions imposed after 2014.⁶ According to the data provided by I. Dezhina, if in 2012 the share of foreign foundations and non-profit organizations amounted to 18.5 % in the total volume of foreign funding of Russian science, then by 2017 it was 6.7 %.⁷ In particular, such programs of international cooperation covering scientific research at universities as the joint program of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation and the American-Russian Foundation for Economic and Legal Development (USRF) »EUREKA« were closed.⁸ These programs have played a major role in developing the research and entrepreneurial potential of Russian universities.⁹ At the same time, for example, the number of foreign students from Western Europe and the United States fell sharply and was replaced in the statistics of international student programs by academic exchanges with China and Vietnam. The structure of student exchanges began to more and more resemble academic exchanges in the USSR.¹⁰

Anti-Western policy in Russian higher education and science

As far as Russian domestic policy is concerned, the main laws that caused such a sharp reduction in international cooperation were the laws on »foreign agents« and on »undesirable organizations«.

Adopted in the development of the idea, which became the idea fix of the Russian establishment, especially after 2012 – »the constant interference of the West in the internal affairs of Russia«, the laws known as the »law on foreign agents« and on »undesirable organiza-

tions« had a negative double effect on the Russian academic community. On the one hand, several organizations directly involved in the research suffered; but it had an even greater »chilling effect« both on researchers and teachers, and on civil servants.¹¹

The law »on foreign agents« itself was intended to stop the alleged »active interference of foreign states in the internal affairs of the Russian Federation«. To this end, organizations that receive any support from abroad and engage in »political activities« – understood by Russian justice as any public discussion of »issues related to the state« – are declared »foreign agents«.

Officially, foreign agents are required to mark all public information with a special long justification about their status and receive an additional burden of reporting to the Ministry of Justice. In addition, such an organization is also obliged to submit quarterly reports to the Ministry of Justice, as well as undergo an additional annual financial audit. Finally, all employees of such an organization are required to indicate their status in public speeches and publications. For failure to indicate the status, as well as for the refusal to »voluntarily« declare one's status as a »foreign agent«, a large fine is due.

In fact, the receipt of any money from abroad without any connection with public activities is understood by the courts as a sign of a »foreign agent«, which led to the appearance in the list of NPOs – »foreign agents« of research organizations that were recognized as foreign agents. First, Russian research and educational organizations that worked closely with foreign donors suffered. The most famous »foreign agent« among scientific organizations was, for example, the Levada Center – Russian pollster, which was practically the only independent center for studying public opinion, and electoral statistics.

Other organizations integrated in this list include such scientific and research centers as the Center for the Study of Social Policy and Gender Studies, the Center for Independent Social Research, the Institute of Economic Analysis, the Panorama Center, the Russian Research Center for Human Rights, the St. Petersburg branch of the »Memorial«, as well as the Dynasty Foundation Dmitry Zimin, created to support and develop

Russian science. It is significant that the law on »foreign agents« directly indicates that its provisions should not concern scientific, research and educational activities – but in none of the above cases has this exception been applied.

In the results, the reasons for inclusion in the list of foreign agents of that period, according to court decisions were »the preparation and publication of the results of human rights monitoring for the UN, the publication of educational and human rights literature, scientific research, collection of sociological, political and other information, monitoring and analytical studies (including research made for the authorities)«¹². For example, the Center for Independent Social Research was recognized as a foreign agent for publishing and discussing a scientific report and a scientific monograph, that is, for purely scientific activities.¹³

This law also has direct negative consequences: despite official statements that this status is allegedly not discriminatory and does not entail any consequences other than those prescribed by law, in fact, the fear of communication with »foreign agents« serves as an obstacle not only to cooperation with foreign foundations and organizations, but also to the continuation of partnership with by any government bodies.¹⁴

However, a foreign agent is a status that was first obtained by registered Russian organizations NGO, the media, and, more recently, by individuals – Russian citizens. To exclude cooperation with »anti-Russian« foundations and organizations, another law that hit international cooperation was an amendment to the Law »On Measures to Influence Persons Involved in Violations of Fundamental Human rights and Freedoms, the rights and freedoms of citizens of the Russian Federation, which became known as the law »On Undesirable Organizations«, introduced in 2015. According to this amendment, »The activities of a foreign or international non-governmental organization that poses a threat to the foundations of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation, the country's defense capability or the security of the state«, as well as organizations that participate in political activities (described in the law through a number of political actions, from the initiation of referendums to

participation in elections) may be considered undesirable.¹⁵

In the official register of »undesirable organizations« of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation¹⁶ – organizations that have invested a lot of money to support Russian science and education – the Soros Foundation (Open Society Institute), the American-Russian Foundation for Economic and Legal Development (which financed projects in the field of Higher Education described above), and other funds that supported Russian higher education and science at various times. Finally, in June 2021, Bard College (New York) was also included in the list of »undesirable organizations«. The latter was the first example of an exclusively educational institution with a long history of work in Russia, recognized as an undesirable organization.¹⁷

Apparently, the latter decision was a logical continuation of the policy of searching for »enemies« in universities and scientific institutes. The issue of the »corrupting influence of the West« on Russian students was actively discussed in the commissions of the State Duma of

the Russian Federation and the Federation Council of the Russian Federation. The latter, in its report to the Interim Commission for the Protection of State Sovereignty and the Prevention of Interference in the Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation, states that in the policy of »interference«, the main target audiences of the United States »consider youth, students, academic circles«, which, therefore, need to be »protected« from »the dangerous influence of Western countries, primarily the United States organizations for election observation«. Actually, in practical terms, this resulted, for example, in the requirement of the prosecutor's office to the Russian university to report on the presence of groups that carry out »... indoctrination of Russians, primarily young people, and the creation of pro-American influence groups in this environment,« and explains this by the need for »... enforcement of legislation by scientific and educational organizations.«¹⁸

The strengthening of state control over universities under the slogan of the

reform of science and higher education, in fact, revived the Soviet practice of pathological control over all contacts with foreigners, especially in the field of scientific and technical cooperation. Order »On Export Control«, signed back in 1999¹⁹, although it generally refers to the control over the export of nuclear weapons, military technology, etc., nevertheless, it has intensified the work of the so-called »First Departments« (dealing with secrecy) and, in general, updated the scope of excessive control over the activities of researchers and teachers of higher educational institutions.

The tendency towards self-isolation and the search for internal and external enemies is also noticeable in the general situation with those scientists who have become victims of espionage within the Russian Academy. The main victims of the strengthening of the »fight against spies« were researchers and researchers who did not have access to classified information, however, were accused of disclosing military secrets. Since that time, espionage cases have been con-

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stantly arising, and it is especially significant that in most cases the accused either did not have access to state secrets, or this transfer was initially authorized by the state. It is significant while all organized espionage processes, in fact, ignore the fact that not only cooperation, but also the fact of the transfer of data, subsequently qualified as a »military-technical secret«, could not take place, according to the law, without the control of special agencies, namely, the FSB. The Russian team of human rights lawyers »Team 29« drew attention to these trials as examples of completely illegal, closed from the public processes in which the basic principles of judicial proceedings are constantly violated: most of these cases end in convictions; however, the researchers note, »many extremely lenient sentences suggests that the evidence base of such cases causes even the sentencing courts have doubts.«

Such an atmosphere could not but affect many foreign invited teachers in Russia: the study shows that along with the tension in those universities that invited them – as a rule, they were members of the same group of universities within the framework of the 5-100-2020 project, some scientists »mentioned open anti-Western sentiments outside the walls of their university«²⁰.

Thus, the strong anti-Western sentiments of the Russian elite, even before the start of the war, undermined the efforts of the authoritarian government to internationalize Russian science. The beginning of the war, it seems, simply put an end to this ambitious project.

As a result, the situation with academic rights and freedoms has predictably worsened. This also affects international assessments of the situation: for example, the V-DEM project shows a serious drop in indices related to academic rights and freedoms, especially after 2014.

Russian academia after the beginning of the war

The outbreak of the war put an end to the dual policy in the field of higher education and science, which combined aggressive anti-Western rhetoric with serious international projects in the field of science and higher education with Western participation. Most Western



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universities have cut off all communication with Russian universities, especially after the shameful letter of Russian rectors who openly supported Russia's attack on Ukraine. All international projects with Russian participation have either been completely curtailed or frozen. Most of the European states not only directly condemned the aggression, but also introduced a regime of de facto academic boycott of Russian science and education.²¹

The part of the Russian academic community that has always been oriented towards international cooperation, and is more democratically oriented, spoke out against the war most sharply and radically. Several anti-war petitions and letters from Russian students, teachers, and representatives of various scientific disciplines express their disagreement with the war. One of the most striking letters of protest was the publication in the newspaper *Troitsky Variant*.²²

Anti-war protests in Russia are facing direct pressure, as simply demanding peace under newly adopted Russian laws could be interpreted as »discrediting the actions of the Russian army.« In the result, teachers and students are persecuted for their anti-war posts, both

by university authorities and by law enforcement agencies.

At the same time, the regime increased pressure on »foreign agents«: if before the war there were only three people from the field of science and higher education on the list of the Ministry of Justice, then with the outbreak of the war, he was included in the list of »foreign agents« as the author of this text, and such well-known Russian scientists and teachers as Ekaterina Shulman, Viktor Vakhshstein. In addition, according to official data, the Russian government plans to ban »foreign agents« – individuals – teaching and educational activities (this measure is already used against organizations recognized as »foreign agents«). Finally, the practice of »cleansing« universities from critics and opponents of the modern Russian regime by simply not renewing the contract.²³

In this situation, many scientists, and students, among other Russian citizens, decide to emigrate – hundreds of thousands have already left the country, mainly through countries open to Russians, like Georgia and Armenia. Those who chose to seek asylum in Europe faced the European policy of waiving long-term visas for Russian citizens.

Russian scientists and students, in exile, are faced with a total academic boycott – many countries declare their refusal even on a personal level to cooperate with Russian researchers and accept Russian students. At the same time, the international academic community seems to proceed from the logic of continuing personal contacts, and the complete impossibility of institutional ones.

To respond these challenges, universities are being created in exile – such as the Free University, the University of New Europe; many teachers and students are trying to build networks of support and research even when they are far from home. At the same time, students and teachers are trying to find a new affiliation, a new job, to enter foreign institutions.

Meanwhile, it is obvious that a large-scale isolation of the Russian scientific community is yet to come, and its principles and duration depend not only on the development of the military-political situation, but also on the position of the international academic community in general.

Anmerkungen

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