

## RUSSIAN HIGHER SCHOOL: REORGANIZATION OF THE SOVIET INHERITANCE

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Basing on the analysis of the present-day tendencies in the development of Russian higher school and the plans of its reformation, the author of the article dwells upon the perspectives of the merger of higher educational establishments and the foundation of federal and national research universities.

The pros and cons of the reorganization are considered from the point of view of monopolization of regional educational markets and problems arising in controlling and administrating the activities of higher school institutions.

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Since 1990s, the system of Russian vocational training has been in permanent transformation resulting from the attempts to adapt to the changing economic relations, as well as from recurring reformations.

What are the main characteristics and transformational vectors of the Russian vocational training nowadays? The most noticeable difference from the Soviet school is quantitative. According to Russian statistics, during the 20 years, between 1985 and 2005, the number of higher school students increased by 2,4. In 2007, there were already 7461 thousand of students in Russia. The number of higher school institutions grew from 502 in 1985 to 1108 in 2007 (including 450 of non-state institutions).

The increase in the number of higher educational establishments in Russia is accompanied by crisis. The list of problems in Russian higher education is endless; among them are degradation of training quality, insufficient attention to the needs of economic and social spheres, the gap between the demand for educational services and the possibilities rendered by the government.

The crisis is recognized not only by scientists but also by Russian officials. Suffice it to say that even in the National Educational Doctrine in the Russian Federation it is stated that “during the last decade many former winnings of national education were lost” [4].

What is the way out of the crisis of higher school? We think that first of all it is necessary to search for the best possible

structural and territorial organization of higher schools.

Global economic trends prompt us the ways to solve this problem. General globalization in business has become one of the main tendencies in economy, resulting from the effect of production scale. It means that the increase in the production scale causes a decrease in its costs and finally increases the production efficiency.

Merger of higher schools is taking place in many countries of the world. This tendency has brought to being a new scientific term “educational hypermarket”. Thus, 50 thousand students study in the University of Toronto, 30 thousand in Helsinki University. One of the largest private colleges in the USA – University of Phoenix – trains 70 thousand students [3, p. 297].

This tendency is most vividly revealed in the developing countries. Thus, 137 thousand students study in the Mexican automatic University, and there are 183 thousand students in the University of Buenos Aires. Usually the merger takes place through uniting. In China, for example, Peking Medical University became part of Peking Classical University; Shanghai University of “Fudan” was joined to Shanghai Medical University; 5 universities were united in the province of Jiangxi to form a new one [7, p. 11, 22].

The described above tendency is typical of Russia as well. In 2006, an attempt was made to found two federal mega-universities – the South and the Siberian universities.

The South Federal University was founded on the basis of Rostov State Univer-

sity by adding three other higher educational establishments, with the total number of students of 41 thousand [6].

The Siberian Federal University was also founded by uniting four universities. The staff numbered 2500 teachers, and the number of students – over 33 thousand [5].

The positive effects of such globalization are evident. The effect of production scale mentioned above presupposes decrease in administrative expenses, the formation of common educational space and promotion of scientific research.

On adoption of the law “On Federal Universities” by Duma the process of globalization is likely to accelerate after it is approved of by the Council of Federations and the President.

Another promising form of higher school may be national research universities. Just as in case of “federal educational hypermarkets” the process begins with the foundation of two national research universities – on the basis of Moscow Institute of Engineering and Physics and Moscow Institute of steel and alloy materials.

Unfortunately the official documents determining the strategy of education development in our country do not give the number of future “educational” and research universities. In this respect the most reliable information comes from the publications of the scientists of State University – Higher School of Economics, as this university is authorized to provide for the reform with scientific foundation. Thus, in 2007, rector of this university Y. Kousmenov suggested distinguishing two categories of Russian universities – “educational” and “research” ones [2].

At the beginning of 2008, quite definite characteristics of the new architecture of Russian higher education were presented in the report “Russian Education -2020: A model of Education for Innovative Economy”. In many respects the report was based on the ideas of Minister of Education A. Foursenko.

Among the main structural elements of higher vocational education it is possible to

single out “40-50 federal research universities and 100-150 large universities of regional and interregional significance” [1].

Taking into account the fact that most of leading Russian universities are in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the main principle is likely to be – “one region – one university”.

What good will all the above do for Russian higher education? The pros of globalization are clear and meaningful. Nevertheless, cons might also be very significant. The enlargement of educational establishments, especially by uniting them, will lead to the deficiency of competition in the market of educational services. As for local educational markets it will result in monopolization or oligopoly.

Let's take as an example Kursk region. The educational vocational market is represented by 13 more or less big higher educational establishments, with the number of students more than 1000. All in all 20 educational institutions have license. The number of students in the region is 60 thousand (all forms of education).

To estimate the degree of reflection of competition we use the Herfindal-Hirshman's index which is the sum of squared market shares of all the participants. Our calculations show that the acquired index = 1400 testifies to the insufficiency of competition in the sphere of higher education. This insufficiency is now mainly reflected in the prevalence of the strategy of “following the leader” in the system of price formation. The consequences of the decrease in higher educational institutions under the pressure of Ministry of Education are well known from economic theory. Local monopolists will set the prices higher than the maximum costs. Taking into account the low elasticity of the demand for education in higher professional training this is sure to lead to the raise in the cost of education and the reduction of its availability.

It is also important to mention a noneconomic consequence of the monopolization of educational markets. If there is only one university in the region it will be very prob-

lematic to control and administrate the process of education and its quality. Even in case the quality goes down the government will be deprived of the possibility to annul the state accreditation of such a “superuniversity”, as it might cause serious social problems. If things go from bad to worse all this will limit the availability of higher education, overprice it and worsen its quality.

Availability and price may be regulated administratively, but quality is something that can't be regulated. Thus, despite the necessity to reform Russian higher education system it is important to preserve the variety of the Russian higher educational landscape. Only on this condition the main thesis of the Conception “Modernization of Russian Education” which runs “The National system of education is an important factor that enables Russia to preserve its leading position among the developed countries of the world, its international prestige as a country with a

high cultural, scientific and educational level” will be not pure speculation.

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