



CURRENT TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has undertaken several educational reform measures in order to find the balance between the Soviet legacy and Western model of higher education. Starting from 1992, numerous reforms have been made in the Russian higher education system with the aim of making the tertiary education system more flexible, more variative and less centralized in order to meet demands of the new market system. However, due to the significant governmental budget cuts, huge brain drain and poor management that took place in the 1990s the Russian higher education system has faced a sharp decline in both qualitative and quantitative parameters.

The situation began to change in the early 2000's when the budget shares allocated for higher education started to increase exponentially. The budget shares allocated for tertiary education system peaked in 2012 reaching 603.8 billion rubles compared to 37.6 billion rubles in 2000. Moreover, in 2003 Russia joined the Bologna process initiating the second wave of educational reforms including the introduction of the Unified State Examination. However, some core problems of the education system in Russia, especially, systematic corruption, remained unsolved.

In 2012, the Russian government adopted the Monitoring of Higher Education Institutions Program that determined the thresholds for the effectiveness of universities according to their performances with 50 indicators. According to the program, universities that were recognized as ineffective have to be closed down or merged with other more successful universities. As a result of the monitoring carried out by the Ministry of Education, the number of universities and their branches in Russia were reduced from 2486 in 2014 to 1256 in 2017. It should be highlighted that this reduction mostly affected the private sector education and it is presently unclear to what extent this process will go forward. Therefore, the program together with the significant education budget cuts, which began in 2012 and increased after the sharp decline in crude oil prices and economic sanctions imposed by the Western countries in 2014, caused an overall decrease in the number of universities in Russia.

Understanding that there are still weaknesses in determining and implementing the objectives of Russia's higher education compared to the Western countries, in 2014, the Russian government launched the Global Education Program (GEP) that offers the Russian citizens an opportunity to study at 288 selected foreign higher education institutions. The GEP focuses mainly on funding post-graduate studies in the areas of science, engineering, medicine, education and management in social sphere. The government plans to financially support up to 100,000 Russian students who want to apply for Master and PhD degree programs. In addition, all grant recipients are required to return to Russia after the graduation to be employed in a number of select positions. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS), the number of Russian students studying abroad has actually increased by 22% from 44,913 in 2008 to 56,328 in 2017. The most popular country among the Russian students abroad in 2016-2017 is Germany with 9,953 outbound students, while the Czech Republic, the United States, Great Britain and France account for 5,305, 5,203, 3,933 and 3,599 students, respectively.

In fact, there are still concerns about the quality of Russia's education system. This necessitates the continuation of the educational reforms and elimination of the poorly performing universities. In 2012, Russia introduced the so-called Russian Academic Excellence Project (Project 5/100) aimed to support at least five Russian universities to enter the top-100 of the world's leading universities by 2020. However, according to Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), there are only three Russian universities in top-500 universities of the world. The Moscow State University was given 87th position, while the Saint Petersburg State University and the Novosibirsk State University entered the 301-400 and 401-500 groups, respectively. Moreover, according to the QS World University Ranking, there are eight Russian universities in top-400 universities of the world, namely, the Moscow State University (108), Saint Petersburg State University (258), Novosibirsk State University (291), Bauman Moscow State Technical University

(306) and MGIMO University/Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology (350), Tomsk State University (377), National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University (400). Thus, even well-funded institutions in Russia are still far from the leading Western universities.

Another point related to the tertiary education in Russia is the significant reduction in the number of students. According to the UN estimates, the Russian population will decrease by 10% in the next 35 years from 143.4 million people in 2015 to 128.6 million in 2050, which also will affect the educational sphere. The number of students in Russia has reached its peak of 7.5 million people in 2008 and started to decline constantly since then. This number totaled 5.2 million in 2015 and kept falling afterwards. According to forecasts, the figure may decrease even further to 4.2 million students by 2020. In order to solve this problem, the Russian authorities started to make attempts to increase the number of international students. Nowadays, Russia is one of the most popular destination countries for foreign students in the world. The UIS indicates that the number of foreign students in Russia has increased from 75,786 in 2004 to 282,921 in 2016. About 85% of foreign students come to Russia from ex-Soviet countries, 13% of foreign students come from China, South and South-East Asia, while the rest 2% come from America, Europe and Africa. In 2015, among top five students-sending countries were Kazakhstan (24.9%), Belarus (7.8%), Ukraine (7.2%), China (7.1%) and Uzbekistan (6.5%).

It could be concluded that further reduction of universities' funding, except for those selected to enter the leading world's university rankings under the Project 5/100, together with unclear situation in terms of the number of the Russian students in mid-term constitute the bulk of problems in Russia's high education. However, the Russian authorities make efforts on implementing best practice in educational management and student training learning from the more advanced experience of the Western and Asian universities.

Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, appointed Senators to the Parliament for the six-year term. Saule Aitpayeva, Vladimir Volkov, Bakytzhan Zhumagulov, and Talgat Musabayev were appointed by the President.
- During his official visit to Baku, the Chairman of the Committee on Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan, Artukbek Yusupov, and the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, discussed the issues relating to the exchange of experience and cooperation between religious organizations.
- During her official visit to Minsk, the State Secretary of Kazakhstan, Gulshara Abdykalikova, and the Head of Belarus President's Administration, Natalya Kochanova, discussed bilateral trade cooperation focusing on strengthening interregional and cultural-humanitarian ties.
- During his official visit to Tashkent, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Rashid Meredov, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, discussed prospects for further development of bilateral relations in various fields and exchanged views on the issues of international and regional agenda.
- During his official visit to Tashkent, the Minister of Agriculture of China, Han Changfu, and the Prime Minister of Uzbekistan, Abdulla Aripov, discussed cooperation in the field of investments in agriculture including the construction of agro-industrial parks and joint creation of an international exemplary zone of livestock.
- The Assistant Commander of Russia's Central Military District, Colonel Yaroslav Roshchupkin, announced that more than 3,000 Russian and Tajik military personnel took part in the first joint snap combat readiness check, which started in Tajikistan. The servicemen of the two armies backed by the Russian operational-tactical and army aviation performed training on the mountainous firing grounds of Lyaur and Kharbmaydon.
- The Defense Minister of Azerbaijan, Zakir Hasanov, reported that the contract for the delivery of Russian tanks, BM-30 Smerch heavy multiple rocket launchers and Msta-S self-propelled howitzers to Azerbaijan is nearly completed. It was noted that the contract was fulfilled by almost 90% and was fully paid.

- The Southern Military District of Russia reported that three Caspian Fleet fast attack crafts, namely, Grad Sviyazhsk, Uglich and Veliky Ustyug, completed training exercises to neutralize sea and air targets with missiles and artillery in naval drills.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- The Head of the Federal Antimonopoly Service (FAS) of Russia, Igor Artemyev, announced that the Government Commission on Foreign Investments approved the €1.8 billion deal on the acquisition of a 24.99% stake of Severneftegazprom, which is a subsidiary company of the Russian energy giant, Gazprom, by the Austrian OMV. Severneftegazprom controls 1.1 trillion cubic meters of gas.
- The Kazakhstani state-owned railways company, Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, reported that the volume of cargo transportation between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan amounted to almost 1.05 million tons in January-June 2017, which is 164% increase compared to the same period of 2016. It was noted that the growth was achieved due to the increase in exports of the Kazakh producers' oil products through the territory of Azerbaijan. It was noted that imports also increased by 100,500 tons, while transit traffic increased twofold by 9,800 tons.
- The Board of Directors of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) approved a new country strategy for Kazakhstan. The strategy outlines the EBRD's primary areas of investment and policy engagement in the country over the next four years.
- The Central Bank of Russia stated that in January-June 2017 the country's foreign debt increased by 3% to \$529.62 billion. The main share of the country's foreign debt accounted for private and non-banking sectors of the economy, which grew by 2.43% to \$351.58 billion in the reporting period.
- The Financial Market Supervisory Authority of Azerbaijan reported that the total volume of capital of the country's banking sector increased by 44.5% and amounted to almost \$1.63 billion in January-May 2017. It was also noted that by May 2017, the sector's total assets amounted to \$17.85 billion as compared to \$18.64 billion in late 2016. Loan portfolio of Azerbaijani banks reached \$8.53 billion in January-May 2017, while this figure was \$9.45 billion at the end of 2016.
- The President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, signed the Resolution on Urgent Measures to Reliably Provide

Population with the Main Types of Socially Significant Foodstuffs, according to which a Fund for Assisting to Price Stabilization in the Internal Consumer Market was established. It was noted that the fund was created to stabilize seasonal fluctuations in supply and demand for food products. The fund will be provided with \$100 million from the Ministry of Finance of Uzbekistan.

Society and Culture

- The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, declared July 15 as the annual national holiday of democracy and unity. Turkey held a series of events to celebrate the first anniversary of the defeat of last year's failed coup attempt, including the inauguration a monument featuring the names of the victims near the foot of the Martyrs' Bridge in Istanbul.
- According to the Decree on Measures to Radically Improve Activities of Internal Affairs Bodies in the Sphere of Migration Processes and Registration of Citizenship, signed by the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the country will introduce an electronic system for providing public services and regulating admission of citizens, simplifying procedure for issuing biometric documents, reviewing and processing documents for traveling abroad, obtaining a permanent and temporary residence permit, registering at the place of stay, and providing address and reference information.
- According to the press service of the Gagarin Cosmonauts Training Center, the primary and backup crews for a flight to the International Space Station (ISS) was approved. The primary crew of the Soyuz MS-05 spacecraft consists of the Russian cosmonaut Sergey Ryzhansky, NASA astronaut Randolph Bresnik and astronaut of the European Space Agency (ESA) Paolo Nespoli. The backup crew includes the Russian cosmonaut Alexander Misurkin, NASA astronaut Mark Vande Hei and the Japanese astronaut Norishige Kanai. It was noted that Ryzhansky and Bresnik will fly to the ISS for the second time, while Nespoli will be heading for his third spaceflight.
- The State Revenue Committee of the Ministry of Finance of Kazakhstan announced that in July 2017 the roadside checkpoints (Syrdarya and Tselinny) located on the border with Uzbekistan were opened. The checkpoints are open for individuals and cars to pass in a simplified procedure. The passing of commercial cargo through these points is prohibited.