THE RUSSIAN STATE AND ITS UNIVERSITIES: 
A HISTORY OF THE PRESENT

The article offers a broad historical overview of the university policy of the Russian state. It suggests that such a general picture could shed some fresh light not only on the role of the state in shaping the Russian university model throughout two and a half centuries, but also on the way of its functioning as the means of knowledge production and transmission. The wide chronological range of the overview primarily aims at singling out the major phases of this policy and at sketching its main directions. Five such phases are distinguished: 1) University as a project of enlightened monarchs (1724 – early nineteenth century); 2) University as a state enterprise aimed at modernization (long nineteenth century); 3) University as a socialist enterprise (1918 – 1991); 4) University as a post-socialist enterprise (1991 – early 2000s); and finally 5) the Russian university model reconsidered (ca. 2005 – 2012). The article’s narrative is structured chronologically in accordance with these phases, highlighting major characteristics of each.

Keywords: Russia, history, university, state, educational policy.

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1. The University as a Project of Enlightened Monarchs (1724 – Early Nineteenth Century).

The foundation of the first university goes back to Peter the Great, who, being inspired by the idea of making Russia a part of the European world, ordered in 1724 to establish in Saint Petersburg the Academy of Sciences, together with the Academic University and Gymnasium. The basic principles of this undertaking were conceptualized in his correspondence with famous German scholars Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz and Christian Wolf. The draft standing order of the new institution proclaimed that its general aim was “to multiply and develop sciences.” As to the pattern of the Russian Academy, the order refers to Paris Academies, although it also repeatedly underlines an important difference: in addition to studying science and arts, its members have to be engaged in teaching. This difference suggests that besides the French pattern, the concept of Peter’s enterprise also largely came from his own experience in the Netherlands, where academies and universities at that time were intertwined.

In 1725 the first foreign professors arrived in Saint Petersburg (most of them from Germany), and in the next year they began their lectures in mathematics, physics, and the humanities (in German and Latin). In the following decades the university teaching was irregular, and the main reason for this irregularity was the lack of students. From 1726 to 1733 there were only 38 students, most of which were foreigners with only a few Russians. Later (from 1733 to 1738 and in 1740) classes were suspended completely from a lack of students, then continued for a few more years until the termination of the University activities around 1767.

One of the main reasons for the shortage of students was the general condition of education in the country, where teaching was mainly conducted not in schools, but in the home, and in most cases was limited to such basics as reading and writing. The government officials tried to solve this problem by inviting foreigners, by bringing students, who were sent

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3 Russian students were brought to Saint Petersburg mostly from Moscow Slavic Greek Latin Academy. On the early activities of the Academy see: Dmitrii Tolstoy, Akademicheskii universitet v XVIII stoletii. Saint Petersburg, 1885.

earlier to western universities back to Russia, by transferring students from theological seminaries, and opening up university education to the lower estates of Russian society, though all in vain. In 1765 half of the 18 students of the Academic University declared their incapacity for studies and asked for resignation\(^5\).

As an institution, the first Russian University more resembled a state department than a Western European university of that era. It functioned under the strict governance of the highest state bodies with the Empress on top and did not enjoy any autonomy in appointing either its director or professors. The University students received salaries from the state and had a specially designed uniform that distinguished them from other state officials (green caftan, hat and rapier)\(^6\), and University graduates had privileges in government service\(^7\). Upon returning to Saint Petersburg, Mikhail Lomonosov, who studied in Germany and Holland from 1736 to 1741, remarked with regard to the Academic University: “neither image of the university, nor similarity to it is seen.”\(^8\)

The second attempt of establishing the university in Russia, undertaken by Peter’s daughter, Empress Elisabeth I, was much more successful. The institution she founded under the name of the Imperial Moscow University demonstrated strong continuity into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since the 1940s, under the name of Lomonosov Moscow State University, it had become the largest university in the USSR and the symbol of Soviet and then post-Soviet higher education.

The rhetoric of the empress’ founding decree of January 12, 1755, provides the reason for her undertaking\(^9\). First, the document highlights that the establishment of the new university is a continuation of Peter’s efforts to bring Russia, which is “laying deep in ignorance and weakness,” to “knowledge of genuine prosperity of humankind.” Then it states that the new institution should serve to Elisabeth’s main aim as the empress, which is doing everything to benefit her fatherland. “Our only desire and purpose,” she declares, “is to provide for people’s prosperity and glory for the fatherland.” A substantial part of the text is devoted to glorification of the sciences. “As every good comes only from an enlightened mind,

\(^7\) In accordance with the Regulations of Saint Petersburg Academy approved in 1747.
\(^8\) Anatolii Avrus, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
and evil, on the contrary, is eliminated,” continues the impress, “it is necessary to seek that through proper sciences, every useful piece of knowledge is to grow in our vast empire.” She states then that “everywhere science is desired and everywhere it brings good,” that “enlightened peoples are glorified and raised above peoples that live in the darkness of ignorance,” etc. The final statements once again return to the discussion of benefits that the Moscow University would bring to the fatherland. They suggest that in a short period of time a legion of well-educated Russian nationals would appear, who would be able to produce various scientific inventions and to serve with their knowledge for the benefit of the Empire, as well as for the common good.

Despite the optimistic tone of the decree, in the first decades of its existence Moscow University confronted the same two major problems as its predecessor in Saint Petersburg, namely the lack of professors and students. If the first problem was more or less easily solved by importing graduates and professors from European universities (mostly from Germany again), the second appeared to be challenging: regardless of compensation for their study and promotion in the state service, students were recruited with difficulty. The reason for this was not only the lack of qualified incoming learners, but also the dominant attitude of the Russian public to the new establishment as to something redundant or even alien. Russian nobility treated university education as an unnecessary novelty and preferred to send their offspring to military schools. As for the young men from other estates of Russian society, they did not have enough background for university studies because of the lack of gymnasiums and secular public schools in the country. To encourage student enrollment, the Empress issued two decrees (in 1756 and 1758) that equated university study to military service and awarded graduates with the military rank of junior officer. Notwithstanding the temporary success, these measures did not make a difference. At the end of the eighteenth century, the total number of students at the University did not exceed 100 at a time, and the number of graduates in some years was less than ten.\(^{10}\)

The mode of functioning of the new university was also not much different from its Saint Petersburg ancestor. It was directly subordinate to the Senate, both its director and curator were appointed by the crown (the last one from supreme Russian statesmen), and in many other dimensions, it was functioning as an inseparable part of the imperial bureaucratic

\(^{10}\) Anatolii Avrus, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
machine. The examples that reveal this inseparability are numerous and manifold. Here are just some illustrations regarding the students’ status. The University director annually reported to the curator and to Catherine the Great about the results of their final exams in detail, providing the students’ names and specializations. The university police officer monitored students to keep and maintain order and cleanliness in their dorms, and reported to the director on a daily basis about disorders of any kind. All students, in the same way as their Saint Petersburg mates, had to wear uniforms, live in a specially allocated area near the University, etc.

This strict subordination to the state apparatus and semi-military organization reveal the two most significant characteristics that distinguish the first Russian universities from their Western progenitors of the time.\textsuperscript{11}

2. The University as a State Enterprise Aimed at Modernization (The Long Nineteenth Century).

The new attempt of the Russian crown to establish a stable university education dates back to the early nineteenth century. This period, associated with reforms of the emperor Alexander I, is often treated as the true beginning of the history of Russian universities. Alexander and his associates worked out and implemented a grandiose plan of creating an all-Russian network of educational institutions: from elementary schools to universities. Different circumstances stirred up this ambitious undertaking: the unrealized idea of Peter the Great to bridge the gap between Russia and educated European nations, some personal characteristics of the young emperor (primarily his broad liberal educational background), but for the most part, the growing need for qualified bureaucrats.

The main ruling of the reform, The Statute on Organization of Educational Institutions of 1803, rested upon three basic principles: openness of education to all estates; free study at the beginning level; and continuity in the content of educational programs at all levels. In the next year the charter of the Imperial Moscow University was officially approved introducing freedoms in teaching and learning, earlier unknown to Russian academia. Their implementation though met insurmountable obstacles. As a historian remarked on this point, “Freedom in teaching spontaneously vanished because of the deficit of academics, freedom in learning – because of distrust in students’ unauthorized activities.”

At the same time, the charter considered university professors and students a specific “learned estate” and proclaimed “preparation” of young people for government service as the university’s main mission. It also ruled that the University would be subordinate to the Ministry of Public Education and, in parallel, to the supervisor appointed by the emperor. As for the University rector, he would be nominated by the professors among themselves, and then confirmed by the emperor. After a few years, following these same principles, five new universities were founded all over Russia.

In the later period of his reign, Alexander, disappointed by the poor implementation of the reform (all universities continued to suffer from the shortage of students and qualified

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professors), influenced by the reactionary policy of the Holy Alliance, and haven fallen into a mystical mood, reconsidered this educational prospect. He decided to substitute secular and open education with “spiritual education,” primarily addressed to gentry and aimed at combining knowledge with faith, “for Christian piety would forever become the foundation of true enlightenment.” However, despite this step back, Alexander’s reign brought a revolutionary change into education in Russia by initiating a centralized national system that is now often recognized as the beginning of the Russian educational model.

After Alexander’s death, followed by the December 1825 revolt and its defeat, the attitude of the Russian authorities towards universities had changed once again. They now clearly realized that the liberal, western-style university might be threatening to the authoritarian monarchical power. At the same time, economic and social transformations in the country invoked a new strong demand for educated people. These two contradictory tendencies largely defined the dual university policy of the state until the end of the nineteenth century. Ideologically this policy largely rested upon the concept of Russian national identity articulated in the famous triad: pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, and narodnost’. This concept of national identity presupposed that these three key characteristics distinguished Russia from other European nations and made her superior to them in a moral sense. Both the official and public discourse of the time repeatedly declared that on the one hand, Russia should not be left behind the development of sciences in the West, but on the other hand, it should resist Western materialism and merge education with the Orthodox faith.

The new charter of 1835, which became the model for the five major universities in Russia, perfectly reflected this duality. The same as the first charter of 1804, it was composed in view of the progressive German model, mostly after the University of Göttingen, though it had evident and significant peculiarities. University autonomy from the state was considerably reduced; the inner university censorship was reestablished; theology, church history, and current law became obligatory educative courses for all faculties; students’ status as semimilitary servants was kept untouched; and the Humboldtian idea of the freedom of teaching and learning was abandoned completely. The emergence of the first Russian student organizations with political agendas in the 1830s and 1840s and the outbreak of revolutions in

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14 Bol’shoi russkii biograficheskii slovar’ ([http://www.rulex.ru/01010228.htm](http://www.rulex.ru/01010228.htm)).
15 Sergey Shevyriov, Istoriia imperatorskogo Moskovskogo universiteta. Moscow, 1855, p. 469.
Europe in 1848-1849 raised new concerns for the government about the social role of universities, and its fear of “harmful” ideas imposed new restrictions on their functioning altogether with severe control of the curriculum.

The second half of the century is marked by the rapid expansion of university education all over the country followed by significant changes in the place and role of universities in Russian society – in particular, by consolidation of the university corporation and by a sudden growth of its self-awareness. Besides general economic and social causes, the formation of the new university identity was triggered by the new generation of professors, many of whom received postgraduate education in Europe and, along with their knowledge, brought to Russia ideas of university freedoms. Starting in the 1860s, these ideas entered the discourse of Russian intellectuals. As a prominent scientist of that time, Nikolai Pirogov remarked in his memoirs, “everywhere the idea of dignity, importance, and strength of the corporation was observed.”

The new place and role of universities in Russian society were also significantly bound to the broad reforms of Alexander II, “The Liberator.” These reforms proclaimed universities open to the “lower” estates of the Russian society, abandoned students’ status as state employees (kazennokoshtnye studenty), and control over them outside the university. Furthermore, it declared considerable autonomy for the university from governmental structures. However, the reform did not transform it into a copy of its German prototype. The University Charter of 1863 merged the German model with the French one, which largely treated universities as branches of the Ministry of Education. Hence, for the liberal part of Russian professors and students, the desired autonomy from the state and freedoms of curriculum, as well as resolute separation of education from government service, were still more anticipated goals than reality.

At the same time, the new “republican” organization of universities that gave considerable power to their professors in making administrative decisions openly contrasted the monarchical organization of the Russian Empire and raised criticism of the reactionary top bureaucracy. New concerns of the government about the “liberties” given to the professorial

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16 Pavel Miliukov, op. cit.
17 See a detailed study of this period: Regina Eimontova, Russkie universitety na grani dvukh epokh: ot Rossii krepstnoi k Rossii kapitalisticheskoi. Moscow, 1985.
corporations were activated by the university unrest of 1874 and resulted in the return of the rigid state control of education.\footnote{Pavel Miliukov, \emph{op. cit.}}

The duality of state policy towards universities is perfectly reflected in the subsequent university charter approved in 1884 by the new emperor, Alexander III, enthroned after the assassination of his father by revolutionaries in 1881. On the one hand, following the Humboldtian model, the charter revitalized the idea of the “liberty in teaching and learning,” on the other, it strongly reduced university autonomy by giving the Ministry of Education the right to appoint university rectors, deans, and professors.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, Russia gained quite a distinct system of university education, which was characterized by strong centralization, unification, and rigorous state control. This system was basically constructed in accordance to the mid-century Prussian model but was also strongly affected by the French model, which advocated the spread of the state-authorized body of knowledge from the center to the periphery.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century and in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the idée fix of Russian university corporations was autonomy from the state, which was inseparably tied up with the political struggle for individual liberties. By 1914, these corporations became quite a powerful force that numbered ten institutions with more than 37,000 students recruited from all estates of society. It is not a surprise that these corporations met the February revolution of 1917 and the establishment of the Provisional Government with great enthusiasm. The announced political freedoms and democratic reforms raised their new expectations about obtaining independence from the state. However, these hopes were buried by the subsequent political events.

The communist project declared by the Bolshevik revolution was aimed at accomplishing radical transformations of the entire Russian society. The most important of them assumed building a new proletariat state (with the perspective of its elimination in the future), a new social structure with the leading role of the proletariat (also expecting elimination of social differences in the future), and creation of a new individual whose innate qualities would develop harmonically. Reaching these aims was planned through converting the backward Russian economy into the most advanced economy in the world. This grandiose project of social, economic, and cultural transformations also demanded revolutionary changes in people’s education and university education in particular.

During the first years of its implementation, while meeting revolutionary demands of the time, the Bolshevik government made several steps toward democratization of higher education: tuition fees and entrance exams were canceled, universities became freely open to every citizen over the age of sixteen, and several new institutions of higher education were founded. The democratization of the communist type also meant policy aimed at changing the class structure of the students, now mostly recruited from the families of former exploited classes (the so-called positive discrimination) and considered to become a new social group of soviet intelligentsia to replace the old bourgeois one.

Democratization of this type went hand in hand with ideologization, the main tools of which were teaching communist ideology through obligatory subjects (“The Development of Social Forms,” “Historical Materialism,” “The Proletarian Revolution,” “The Political System of the Russian Federation,” and “The State Plan of Electrification of Russia,”), purging “bourgeois” professors and training their proletarian successors. Ideologization also meant establishing local Party and Komsomol organizations in every university and sending Soviet commissars to each of them with the right to veto any decision made by the rector or university council. As for the demands of university autonomy, earlier revoked by the February revolution, they were officially blamed as “bourgeois” and senseless, because,

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19 Anatolii Avrus, op. cit., p. 52.
following Bolshevik ideology, the state in the new society serves the true interests of the majority of people\textsuperscript{20}.

In the mid-1920s, after suppression of the universities’ opposition to the state control with purges and arrests of students and professors in Moscow, Petrograd, and several other cities, their pre-revolutionary strict subordination to the government was reestablished and reinforced\textsuperscript{21}. In Soviet historiography this reinforcement and the aftermath it produced are often generalized by the term “universities’ sovietization.”

The first Soviet five-year plan (1928-1932) put rapid economic development on the agenda of the country, especially in regards to heavy industry. As Joseph Stalin later declared in one of his speeches, “We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in 10 years. Either we do it, or we shall go under\textsuperscript{22}.” Realization of this overambitious task, among other things, demanded educating thousands of technicians and engineers to work in the industrial sector. The demand immediately affected the state policy in higher education. State officials of different levels and communist activists put on the agenda the idea that the current old-fashioned university model did not fit into these new challenges and suggested that universities had to be split into smaller institutions specialized in teaching technology and applied sciences vitally necessary for the economy. In these institutions, the period of study had to be reduced to three years, faculties had to be reorganized into multiple specialized “sectors,” and the most theoretical sciences together with the humanities had to be abandoned\textsuperscript{23}. Consistent continuation of this policy, labeled in American historiography as “the assault on the universities” (Michael David-Fox), would have led to their complete disappearance as the institution\textsuperscript{24}.

However, the soviet leadership soon realized the fallacy of this policy. Two decrees passed by the Party Central Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars in 1931, reincarnated the idea of universities as centers of science and research and proclaimed the need of their multiplication all over the country. The year 1932 marks a volte-face in the

\textsuperscript{23}Shaikhulla Chanbarisov, \textit{op. cit}, p. 197.
Soviet educational policy – the state started rebuilding and strengthening its university system. This new policy resulted in the creation of a highly centralized and unified Soviet model of university education by the end of the 1930s. In his book, “The Formation of the Soviet University System,” published in 1988, one Soviet historian proudly states that by that time “in our country, a principally new university system, considerably different from other university ‘models’ known in the world, was established.” The author also adds that since then, the institutions of higher education “have become reliable tools of the communist transformation of society.”

One of the chief objectives of this new model was the introduction of a meritocratic principle for student enrollment instead of the class principle practiced in the early Soviet period. This objective, not to mention the need for professionals for economic development, was prompted by the new ideology of the 1936 Constitution that proclaimed the disappearance of the exploiting classes as a result of the victory of socialism.

The following decades demonstrated consolidation and further development of this model. Its icon became the Moscow State University, which in 1940 received the name of Mikhail Lomonosov. In the following years, especially after construction of its monumental complex was finished, the university became an indisputable symbol of Soviet sciences and higher education and an unattainable model both for already existing universities and for those few dozen that were founded later.

The establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education of the USSR in 1946 resulted in further unification of university education in the country. It approved the model university charter intended as a sample for individual universities; required five-year study period as obligatory for students of all universities; and authorized publishing of hundreds of university textbooks on all subjects of the state approved university curriculum (most of them were written by professors of Moscow University).

During the three decades under the guidance of the Ministry more than twenty new universities appeared in various regions of the country. Besides the need for thousands of qualified specialists in different sectors of economy, science, education, and culture, this rapid

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25 Shaikhulla Chanbarisov, op. cit., p. 3. The author also argues that the turning point in this formation was the decree of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR of September 19,1932 (p. 202).
expansion was prompted by the new political agenda: after the 21st Congress of the Communist party, the entire Soviet society was mobilized to reach the goal of building communism, and universities were now treated as important tools for constructing “a fully developed person” for the communist future.

By the early 1980s, the development of the Soviet university system reached its peak. It became a large and complex entity characterized by direct subordination to the government and strong unification in every aspect of its functioning. In the previous decades the government established a nationwide uniform university curriculum, a register of university administrative and teaching positions, a grading system, the student ID, and even the uniform student Record Book. In order to promote Marxist ideology, it also established ideological courses, which were mandatory to all faculties of all Soviet institutions of higher education since the 1960s: “The History of the Communist Party,” “Marxist-Leninist Philosophy,” and “Scientific Communism.”

The years of perestroika were marked by resolute distancing from orthodox Soviet Marxism and the beginning of tectonic changes in the sphere of public and state politics. These changes, however, did not have significant effect on universities. The strict centralized university curriculum was slightly loosened and teaching Marxist subjects became more liberal, but the system crafted in the 1930s was left untouched.

The collapse of the USSR and the emergence of new post-socialist Russia had a significant effect on the state system of higher education. However, at least for the decade following the collapse, the university was not among the major topics of state concern. The new authorities were deeply engaged in key economic, political, and ideological transformations of Russian society and paid attention to higher education only sporadically.

The first and most obvious change took place in the ideological sphere. Renunciation of Marxism as the official ideology immediately resulted in reshaping the national university curriculum by removing compulsory Marxist subjects and replacing them with presumably non-ideological substitutes, such as “A History of Political Theories,” “Political Science,” and “Cultural Studies.”

After this transformation, the two laws with substantial liberal reformist potential laid profound legal background for the new structure and the new mode of functioning for the university system: “On Education” (1992) and “On Higher and Postgraduate Education” (1996). Both laws announced universities’ considerable financial autonomy from the state and reintroduced, after decades of disregard, the notion of academic freedoms. However, the inertia of the Soviet model appeared to be strong and allowed for implementation of the proclaimed changes only partially: the liberties in financial management came into practice very quickly, while the academic freedoms were generally rejected.

The most profound social result of this legislation was the revival of paid education, which happened in two ways. The first was through state educational institutions, which were now allowed to take tuition fees from the students admitted over the state determined quota. The second happened through newly emerged and rapidly expanded web of non-state private universities, whose financial security in most cases relied upon tuition fees.

Considerable changes also took place in the universities’ curriculum. The 1994 National Standard of Higher Professional Education29, in order to meet vital economic and

29 Postanovlenie Pravitel'stva RF ot 12.08.1994 N 940 “Ob utverzhdenii gosudarstvennogo obrazovatel’nogo standarta vysshego professional’nogo obrazovaniia” (http://www.innovbusiness.ru/pravo/DocumShow_DocumID_44893.html)
social demands of new reality, gave way to opening new faculties and departments of Business, Law, Management, etc.

All of these transformations were followed by the rapid increase in the number of universities: according to some estimates, in 1992 alone it jumped from 48 to 97\(^{30}\). This statistics is easy to explain: the new legislation, among other liberties, gave the higher educational institutions the right to define their public status on their own. There is no surprise, then, that many of the technical, pedagogical, agricultural, and other colleges at once chose the more prestigious name of university.

The limited autonomy obtained by universities from the state also resulted in transformations of power relations in the educational sphere, in particular in the appearance and consolidation of the new center of power – university managerial bureaucracy. This bureaucracy, personified by rectors and deputy rectors, quickly became an enormously powerful group and gained total control over their universities by functioning simultaneously as state officials and businessmen (in the Soviet times this control was limited by the state, the Party, and the planned economy)\(^{31}\). In 1992 this group established an NGO, “The Russian Rectors’ Union,” which started to significantly affect national higher education policy by lobbying in the Cabinet of Ministers, the Presidential Administration, the Duma, and the Senate. In the course of two decades it has challenged the Government with two major demands: an increase of budget spending and rejection (either direct or indirect) of reforms under the pretext of their destructive influence to the glorious traditions of the Russian university education\(^{32}\). The voice of this group became especially vocal in opposition to two innovations pushed forward by the government: remodeling of Russian universities in accordance with Bologna Agreements\(^{33}\), and introduction of the Unified State Exam as a universal measure of school graduates’ success\(^{34}\).

\(^{30}\) Anatolii Avrus, op. cit., p. 69.


\(^{32}\) See, for example, criticism of Bologna reforms and The Unified State Exam by the Rector of Lomonosov Moscow State University Viktor Sadovnichii at the Second International Seminar “Rossiia i evropeiskoe prostranstvo vysshego obrazovaniia: plany i perspektivy posle Berlinskoii konferentsii” (Saint Petersburg, October 29-30, 2003).

\(^{33}\) The Russian government signed the Bologna Agreements in 2003.

\(^{34}\) This opposition was eagerly supported by many Russian university professors and representatives of intelligentsia. See for example: Andrei Ranchin, “Nesvoevremennye mysli: o proektakh reform rossiiskogo obrazovaniia,” in Neprikosnovennyi zapas, 2009, №63.
To conclude this part, it is important to emphasize that the briefly mentioned changes did not affect the foundations of the Russian university system. The hierarchical structures of higher education governance and the strict regulation of the content and ways of teaching were not shaken. As some scholars believe, the centralized control by various state bodies over universities in the first years of the post-Soviet period have become even stronger than before. Contrary to the deconstruction of the Soviet model of the centralized planned economy, the centralized planned model of higher education was for the most part left intact.

35 Larisa Shpakovskaia, op. cit., p. 226.
5. The Russian University Model Reconsidered.

However, in the early 2000s some top state officials became aware of how extremely costly and inefficient the existing model of university education was. They also became aware of how tremendously corrupt it had become. This awareness initiated reforms, whose core actions were: allowing universities more academic freedoms; their compliance with Bologna requirements; and implementation of the National Unified State Exam as the standard core measurement for university admission. The expected outcome of these actions (rarely proclaimed openly) was the creation of the new market-oriented, economically effective system of higher education.

The 2004 strategic “Priority Directions of the Development of Educational System of the Russian Federation” were aimed at: 1) replacement of the five-year period of study with the 4/2 year bachelor/master model; 2) creation of new national educational standards more oriented toward acquiring competences rather than a certain body of knowledge; 3) internationalization of higher education; 4) establishment of closer ties between education and science; 5) implementation of continuing education, and at some other less important transformations.

In accordance with this innovative ideology, the new “Regulations on Higher Educational Institutions” of 2008 singled out three types of institutions (universities, academies, and institutes), specified their structure and basic principles of functioning, developed the student admission process (in accordance with the Unified State Exam results), formulated the basic principles of conducting teaching and research, and outlined the procedure of certifying graduates.

The “Regulations” also declared some new liberties unknown to the prior national university model. The most sound of these was university autonomy, which was proclaimed in paragraph 54 as one of the essential principles of its functioning. The notion of autonomy itself was defined in this act as requiring a certain level of university self-government necessary for effective decision-making with regard to its activities fixed by law. And this was not merely a declaration. Universities were given legal rights to shape their inner educational and research structure (faculties and departments) and to develop their own programs independently from the Ministry of Education and Science in keeping with quite flexible
National Educational Standards\textsuperscript{37}. The “Regulations” also enhanced the democratic character of university administration appointments (from rector to department chair), universities’ financial freedoms, including their right to engage in different business activities, and their right to define the range and amount of employees and their salaries, etc.

Another distinctive paradigm of the recent changes is the diversification of the monolithic system. Its first step, aimed at the consolidation of educational and scientific resources in the regions, was the establishment of Federal Universities by merging local institutions of higher education. The official site of the Ministry of Education and Science explains that the goal of this transformation is “the development of system of higher professional education on the basis of optimizing regional educational structures and strengthening links of educational institutions of higher education with economics and social sphere of the federal districts.”\textsuperscript{38} Nine universities of this kind were established between 2006 and 2012: in Krasnoyarsk, Rostov-on-Don, Vladivostok, Kazan, Arkhangelsk, Yakutsk, Yekaterinburg, Kaliningrad, and Stavropol. The second step was made in 2009 and 2010. In order to create a vanguard of innovation in science and education, twenty-nine Russian universities received the status of National Research Universities along with more freedom in their activities (including, for example, working out their own educational standards) and generous financial support in the form of ten-year governmental grants. At the same time, the undeniable symbol of the Russian university model, Lomonosov Moscow State University, received the status of “the unique center of research and education,” which was also followed by generous financial support and the liberty to develop its own educational standards in accordance with national traditions of higher education\textsuperscript{39}.

The loosening of state control on the content of education marks one more important characteristic of the current transformation. From the highly centralized and unified state approved curriculum that dominated in Russia for decades, if not centuries, it is now drifting toward a variety of different university programs and curricula. This process can be clearly traced through a comparison of three generations of State Educational Standards – of 1994, 2009 and 2010 (a draft). The Standards of the first two generations were based on the same

\textsuperscript{37} The model educational programs developed by the Ministry of Education and Science were now declared voluntary.

\textsuperscript{38} http://eng.mon.gov.ru/pro/pnpo/fed/

\textsuperscript{39} The same status and privileges were given to Saint Petersburg State University.
ideology as the Soviet authoritarian educational model and had no essential differences\textsuperscript{40}: both
were subject-centered and provided in detail the compulsory minimum content of concrete arts
and sciences that students should “learn.” The new ideology that clearly suggests rejection of
state control over the content of education is implemented in the draft Standards of the third
generation. This ideology openly follows the main patterns of reforms in higher education that
are currently under way in many European countries under the umbrella of the Bologna
Agreements. The new Standards approach universities as autonomous social institutions of
knowledge production and transmission, and propose that their teaching activities should
result not only in students’ obtaining a selected body of knowledge, but in their mastery of a
set of general and professional competences.

Clearly, these very recent novelties, some of them radical by nature, are not bringing
immediate visible changes to the actual functioning of the Russian university system as a
whole. The authoritarian tradition of university governance, the structure of university
faculties and departments, the dominant professor-centered approach to teaching, and many
other characteristics remain essentially the same as they have been decades before. The
freedom finally obtained from the state has more opened the door for reforms than has brought
significant changes. And it looks like, as in the early history of Russian universities, the
enlightened statesmen initiate changes, and the majority of the Russian public does not
welcome them.

Let us see what will happen next.

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\textsuperscript{40} The State Educational Standards of the second generation described in this way 92 areas of training and 422
professions. If to compare the first and the second with earlier soviet planning, the most vivid novelties would be
adding “the regional component” into more general “federal” content and implementing two level
bachelor/master programs instead of traditional five-year specialist program.