

THE UNIVERSITY AS A MINIATURE STATE

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RJ Dear Andrey Yurievich, do you think that, in Russia, a clearly pronounced ideological positioning is occurring at the country's biggest national universities?

Every university is essentially a state in miniature. For example, **MSU somewhat resembles a mini-empire**, exploring new domains, and **the State University-Higher School of Economics (HSE) is a state reflective of the era of globalisation**, a mobile enclave of the present day.

The ideological role of universities today is inversely proportional to the transformation of institutions of higher education into a service-based institution, which seems to be a trend and, at the same time, related to the dogma of post-industrialism. A depoliticised education teaches anything other than politics as the art of self-determination, how to live alongside others, and how to resolve problems in difficult times. In relation to such political questions, universities are becoming less and less involved.

What's happening in Russia is in line with these processes. Our ideologists can be proud, as our education system is one of the most depoliticised in the world today. In Russia, certainly nothing like the events in France of May 1968 or in China on Tiananmen Square in 1989 is possible.

RJ Have the political preferences and affinities of the teachers and students changed in recent years and if so, then to what extent?

Since 1990s, students have been demonstratively apolitical. It is an original political strategy and it is actually trendy to be interested only in the campus affairs. **Only within the campus walls is some common 'cause' ever pursued, and maybe universal history too.**

But the apolitical policy of students and their demonstrative dis-

missable earthiness, 'real politics' enters the campus without invitation.

On the one hand, it covers the universal horizon of everyday life, monopolising ideals, dreams, common principles, and even the right to hope. On the other hand, the somewhat professional skills associated with civil and political activity disappear, which relates to not only the horizon of general political processes but also with respect to communications with the administrative bodies of the university itself. **As for the teaching staff, its depoliticisation is much more intensified, even in comparison with the situation in the 1990s.**

Instructors have, for the most part, been transformed into insignificant office workers, with their only ideology being the systematic pursuance of their duties. This leads to a situation where any talk about politics extending beyond the limits of an everyday discussion (such as Putin's marital status, Russia's failure at the Olympic Games, etc.) becomes problematic, ambiguous and even a bit shameful.

RJ Can the competition between MSU and HSE be seen as a reflection of a keen political struggle between the conservative and liberal wings of Russian power?

This seems to be a kind of a political prejudice to project ideological

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appointment in both civil activism and official representative politics does not at all limit the possibility of 'real politics' occurring. But when it becomes even vulgar to know politics, and political knowledge itself takes on the features of a non-per-

opposition onto any kind of relations. In terms of social and political analysis, something else is more important; namely, in what way certain relations determine the shape of ideology's interpretation. **I do not think there is a specific conflict**

between MSU and HSE that expands the usual competition that exists between major universities. There is no particular difference between MSU and GU-HSE in regards to their respective management styles; both are depressingly ministerial and both have all the features of a machinery-like hierarchy and directive-based control.

Their general organisational attributes make both universities look for different ways to position themselves on the market, which, in the end, may even generate the *illusion of ideological opposition*. But this is only an illusion relevant to the general marketing strategy of these two universities. By using a little imagination, we can see something ideological in the ways that they position themselves. But this something has nothing to do with the ideologies popular in the nineteenth century that political scientists are used in their sphere of activity; rather, it is all about management and the marketing of brands.

The brand promoted by MSU has a long and diverse history, and this fact inevitably generates a lot of questions. For example, how is this history being dealt with today? Or wouldn't it be an costly shame to follow this very tradition? Which trends are related to the popularisation of Shuvalov in spite of the tendencies that are related to Lomonosov?

With respect to HSE, the number of questions is no fewer. To what extent does the commitment for the present day mean seeking out the administrative resources provided by the country's executive power? Why has the concept of 'catch-up modernisation' become a religious doctrine in the worldview of many experts from HSE?

RJ *Can we consider the growing level of education among the Russian population as some kind of indicator of the level of modernisation of this society?*

The most deplorable outcomes of the artificially exaggerated demand for higher education, which emerged in the 1990s, has also had an effect on the country's universities. As a result of this demand, the structure of these institutions has stagnated completely. **Universities (whether they are state-run or privately-operated) have been transformed into some kind of neo-feudal domain.**

On the one hand, virtually everything can be bought and sold (often including high marks and diplomas). On the other hand, instructors are taking rent for status and universities, on the whole, are extracting rent for the brand, and sometimes even for the lot their institution is established on. This should be well recalled by those who try to cure all problems by money in the manner of the 'blissful 2000s', ultimately failing to understand that **modernisation should concern the modernisers first and foremost**. And today, universities are not so much an engine of modernisation as the object of modernisation. Without the transformation of these institutions, it will not be possible to advance or even begin the modernisation process. ■

Andrey Ashkerov was speaking with Boris Mezhev

IRANIAN UNIVERSITIES HAVE ACCEPTED THE RULES OF THE GAME OF POWER



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As capitalist relations develop, utilitarian tendencies are beginning to prevail throughout European universities. The advantage of theological educational institutions is that they first of all teach to *comprehend* the religious canons. Present-day universities on the other hand, if we use the words of Heidegger, help to *store knowledge* rather than teach the students to think.

Universities stop being a source of manpower for the political class when the matter is to recruit a new elite.

As for the conceptualization of political problems, the faculty at Iranian universities is naturally interwoven in the process of making political and economic decisions. Think tanks are interwoven with state institutions. Besides, there is a **strong competition of ideas** amongst scientists with differing opinions. **It is the scientists who help to work out the decisions and determine the agenda of the country's development.**

I do not think there is any discord between the universities' beliefs and the trends dominating in society. We can say that university students, as the rest of the population, accept the rules of the game offered by the various power bodies.

There have indeed been attempts to destabilize Iran with the help of controlled protest. They have failed.

By western standards, universities of the early 21st century can be seen as a descending power. In the past, universities used to be strongly politicized, even before the term 'polarity' existed; there was neither a multipolar world, as was the case a few decades ago, nor a unipolar world, as is the case now. A quickly changing world gives entertainments to the youth that they have never had before. In such conditions, hastily called by some people 'controlled democracy', there is neither room nor occupation for the youth in politics.

As for Iran, the country is going to continue along the path of reform and meet the hopes and expectations of the population's majority. **Iran is only going to borrow those things from the rest of the world that are positive, and not run counter to the values of the Islamic democracy.** There are inner reserves for prosperity in the country, but they have not yet been used. **Iran has every chance to turn into a leading democracy, of the sort that the history of mankind has not yet known.** ■