

RUSSIA NEEDS ELITE ‘NURSERIES’



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Ideology shows itself when there is some subject trying to systematize its views, its values, to ‘pack’ them and produce them as an ideology. If there is no order for an ideology from some subject – represented by political parties or political leaders – then it is not going to be created by anyone, let alone by universities.

Universities are not political subjects; their role is different, which is first of all to train future political elite for the country. But **there is no systematic training of the Russian political elite.** And Russia certainly needs such a system. There are reasons to scold the Soviet system of recruiting the political elite, but at least it was a system. To rise to the political top, a person had to have both a special theoretical basis, provided not by the universities but mainly by the party educational institutions, and gain a certain experience in performing key roles on different levels of a political system. But today we often see people appear ‘from nowhere’ – they have neither experience, nor special education that could somehow make up for their lack of experience.

Politicians should certainly be trained. Special education in political science could give them an idea of what politics is, what it is made of, what a political system is, what kind of political institutions there are and how they work, how the authorities and society interact, and what a professional politician should know about this very society. But our politicians usually do not know all of these things. On the whole, the level of their education in the humanities – except for the two current leaders of our state – leaves much to be desired. We can recall the phrase from an interview with Chubais. He was asked, ‘How did you manage to fail with the reform?’ He answered, ‘You see, we wanted a progressive idea generally but we did not allow for the reaction of the society’. Here comes the question: did you try to find out the reaction of the society at all? No, you did not. This is the reason that reforms stall. The political elite do not understand the human resources it tries to control. And it can only gain this knowledge from the humanities. ■

THE FUTURE OF RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES IS PESSIMISTIC



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Universities have always been the agents to transform the world. Even in those historic periods when their role was mainly conservative, they still pushed life forward due to the fact that they were occupied with forming a new generation of educated people. So **the question is not if universities take part in modernization but how efficient they are in doing so.**

If universities want to be one of the major engines of modernization in society then they should become more than just suppliers of educational services and places for communication, learning, and places for new knowledge production. They should become a place for shaping and spreading new forms of life and new social practices.

The role of universities is not just to agitate the youth but also to form the intellectual environment that leaves a huge trace in their lives. Let’s take the University of Chicago as an example; two trends created there have come to greatly influence mankind.

Firstly, there is American neo-conservatism. Secondly, there is economic liberalism, a trend that was awarded with the Nobel prize many times. After the war in Iraq and the recent financial crisis, there is no reason to deny that the environment of a university can have a great though indirect influence on political and economic practices.

Will universities in Russia cope with the tasks they face? **I am pessimistic about their future.** Having broken free, universities turned out to be too keen on money. Their desire to enrich themselves resulted both from poor financing and from the collapse of a corporate ethos which had formed long before the decline of the USSR. Is there another explanation for the fact that the wage of the department heads can sometimes be one thousand times higher than that of the young assistant? The universities and departments with a **strong academic reputation suffered much less from the chase for money** than those lacking such standing during the Soviet period. ■