

WILL KORNBERG SAVE BIOCHEMISTRY?



The 2006 Nobel Prize winner, Roger Kornberg, who has been invited to serve as co-chairman of the Scientific and Technical Board for Skolkovo, is an outstanding American scientist working in a field that spans biochemistry, molecular biology, and molecular genetics. This is a fundamental field of scientific inquiry, and serves as a foundation for future research in medicine, pharmacology, and biotechnology. Unfortunately, in these categories, Russian science lags far behind the rest of the world. However, **Roger Kornberg has hardly been invited to this position just because the organizers of the Skolkovo project realize the current deficiency in Russian science. He has been invited precisely because he is a Nobel Prize winner.** According to the views of the people who are far removed from science, the appointment of a great scientist as the head of a scientific institution is sure to bring about new discoveries and general prosperity in science.

In Russia, the situation of science in general, not just in the field of biochemistry, is very disastrous. We are constantly losing creative minds and failing to attract promising young scientists. A specific problem with biochemistry and other experimental sciences is that younger scientists are increasingly tempted to make money on the side after keeping watch over philologists and lawyers do the same. The social system is

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developing in Russia stifles the enthusiasm of young scientists, an enthusiasm which is the birth of all science. Indeed, you could count the number of Russian research groups on one hand whose works in the field of chemistry are quoted in international magazines or journals. Unfortunately, creating a scientific center headed by Nobel Prize laureates will not necessarily help to rescue the situation.

Some time ago, a questionnaire about Skolkovo was sent to the Department of Biology at MSU. Its purpose was to determine the opinion of the scientific community regarding the creation of scientific centers such as Skolkovo. Among some of the questions were the following: 'What are your scientific achievements?' and 'What salary would you consider acceptable for yourself and for your colleagues if you were invited to head the lab?' I answered all the questions and sent the questionnaire back. I don't know what effect if any this will have, but one should at least answer the letters out of courtesy.

If the Russian government has really decided to support science, then it should start with providing the most dignified and promising high-school graduates with free apartments. This step alone would immediately revive domestic science. Of course, it is very unlikely that this simple method will be used. ■

SILICON VALLEY FOR RUSSIA



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The appointment of the Nobel laureate Roger David Kornberg as co-chairman of the Scientific and Technical Board for the project of innovation and modernization in Skolkovo is a positive factor for Russia, and one that should be welcomed in every possible way.

Such an appointment sends out a signal that **Russia is now genuinely ready to learn from direct foreign experience, without the aid of any mediators.** To this end, it has enlisted the services of one of the leading specialists in the field of scientific planning and development.

The invitation of such a famous scientist to participate in the development of Skolkovo also demonstrates Russia's awareness that its major problem – a lagging scientific and technological sector – is not from lack of talent in the country, but rather a result of an overbearing bureaucracy and rampant corruption that negatively influence the processes of scientific and technical development and hinder the progress of countless initiatives.

Invitation of one of the leading American scientists to hold such a high position as co-chairman, and to

become one of the major participants in the development process of the innovative Skolkovo project is encouraging for another reason. It signals a new direction, and **we may now hope that the project itself will be open and transparent** – both in the context of management, and in the purely scientific aspects of its realization.

It is important to keep in mind that, in creating the Skolkovo project, Russia has implicitly recognized the success of Silicon Valley in America. Nevertheless, any project that seeks to artificially create a dynamic and innovative center carries with it enormous risks, despite the overriding success of such areas in the United States.

All we can do is wish every success to Russia in the realization of its innovative project at Skolkovo. The project will hardly change the rules of the game by itself, but **it will stand as a positive example for the rest of Russia.** With this project, Russians will be able to see how business can be conducted in a new way, and how ideas that originate in a center of development like Skolkovo can contribute to the future success of the country. ■