

Reflections on the Reform of Education

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Abstract—Analysis of the Russian education reform results is given. Negative effects of the reform (an increase in the number of paid educational institutions providing low quality education, disproportion in training of specialists, an increase in the paid education sector etc.) and causes of these effects are described. A way to correct the situation in the field of national education is pointed out.

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Since the 1990s Russia has been implementing a reform of education. The very fact of the duration of this process, which exceeds twenty years, from the one hand, testifies to the complexity of the reformed object of the social system and, from the other hand, raises questions about whether certain steps of this reform are well thought out, as the objectives of the reform are not completely clear, whereas its negative consequences are already visible. The reformation of the educational system has been so long that for many school children all years of their education have passed inside an unstable and constantly changing system. As a result, there has been a serious deformation of the “school–higher educational institution” system, related to the transition of former school graduates into the status of students. Of course, it is possible to find defects that need correction in any system. However, what is the cost of these changes and what are the quality and efficiency of the introduced innovations accompanying the reform?

In the education reform the position of the liberals stands out, sometimes reaching the absolute position of breaking the old, including the positive, by all means. There is also a position of the conservatives, which in this situation can hardly be classified as a principled rejection of reformation of the educational system, but rather as a deterrent to ill-conceived reforms.

Education within the framework of general cultural transformation processes is in the midst of the ongoing changes. And it is no accident as education is a systemically important part of culture; it is not just a service sector as it is sometimes interpreted. Due to

this, education cannot be evaluated using only economic criteria; it always has a cultural and upbringing components, the importance of which is not evident. “At the same time, it is also possible to talk about the national character of education. In this respect education is not even a sector but a way of life of almost all people. Some of them are studying, others are preparing to study or teaching their children; grandparents are worried about their grandchildren; and, therefore, all of them are studying.” [1] The majority of the population of any country is involved into educational activities (as in no other) in one way or another. According to official data, approximately 40 million people are involved into the sphere of education as students and teachers, which alone accounts for almost 28% of the total population of the country. However, interests in the sphere of education extend further, as they also apply to parents and relatives, people and organizations paying for education etc.

For a long time Russia had one of the highest levels of education in the world inherited from the previous period of the country’s development. This fact was recognized even by Western scientists and politicians. It is education that could become a factor for sustainable economic growth, capable of making Russia one of the most developed countries of the world. However, it did not happen and, in my opinion, the reason for this was the education reformation model that was used.

From the one hand, the reform of education is following the model that has been always characteristic of

Russia, represented by an alternation of reformation and counter-reformation processes. In other words, the very model of the reform was ill-conceived and, therefore, the performers of the reform zigged and zagged. The unpreparedness of the proposed models and almost complete absence of discussions of these models not only with the general public, but even with the expert community from the very beginning created uncertainty in the reformers themselves, which, in turn, hindered the necessary rigidity of the performed reforms. An idea about a group of “liberals” wishing to conduct reforms and a group of “conservatives” hampering the reforms was continuously forced upon the society. In this context the fact that, despite great support from the government, the liberal reforms were, nevertheless, carried out in an ill-conceived manner and with errors was somehow left out of sight.

As a result, for the last 15–20 years the Russian educational system has accumulated a great number of problems, jeopardizing the high educational potential of the nation. There has been a devaluation of the concept of “education;” for a very long time the idea that the market is the only criterion of demand for educated people, which means that development of educational institutions has to follow these direct market requirements, has been forced upon the society. As a result, there has been a rampant growth in the number of students of higher educational institutions, the percentage of which is continuously growing. At present, a great part of higher educational institutions is represented by private organizations, which leads to a lack of balance in development of specialties, in particular, to a drastic increase in such areas of specialization as “economics and management” or “law.” Since 1995 an annual increase in the number of students of higher educational institutions has reached 7–15%, which is ahead of the demographic indicators, and has approached the natural maximum point.

It is hard to imagine what would have happened in the country in case the rates of increase in the number of students had remained unchanged. In this respect the situation was “improved” by changes in the demographic situation resulting from a wide range of negative socio-economic factors. Since 1992, when the number of the country’s population reached the maximum point of 148.7 million people, there has been a stable decrease. According to demographic forecasts, reflected in the concept of demographic policy of the Russian Federation till 2025, “by 2015 the population of Russia will decrease by 6.2 million

people (4.4%) and will amount to 136 million people, and by 2025 – to 124.9 million people” [2, p. 149]. Correspondingly, this changes the dynamics of the number of students. Thus, in relation to 2005, when the number of students reached the maximum point, this figure will be reduced “in 2012 – by 2.7 million, in 2016 – by 2.9 million, in 2020 – by 2.5 million, and in 2025 – by 1.3 million people” [2, p. 153]. It is expected that by 2014 “due to the unsatisfactory demographic situation the number of students in Russia can be halved as compared to the figures of 2006, according to Andrei Fursenko, Minister of Education...In three or four years the number of students in the country will be twice as low as it is now...which gives 700 thousand students in 2012 as compared to 1.3 million in 2006” [3]. However, the “demographic pit” produces negative factors related to intensification of the population differentiation process, which manifests itself, primarily, in young people who lose the sense of identity with their country and the feeling of love for their Fatherland. According to opinion polls conducted in 2011 “21% of the respondents would like to go abroad for permanent residence (against 5% in 1991) and 20% would like to work abroad (against 13%). The highest emigration potential is characteristic for 18–24 year old Russians (39%), highly educated respondents (29%), and active Internet users (33%). The majority of the 75% of Russians who are unwilling to leave their country are old (93%) and undereducated (85%) people, as well as those who do not use the Internet (87%)” [4].

These objective conditions, for one reason or another affecting the situation in the country, could have been also used for optimization of the situation in the sphere of education. It is at this moment when there are prerequisites for a kind of “requalification” of the country’s higher educational institutions aimed to determine the necessary number of these institutions and, above all, to close educational institutions failing to comply with the required indicators of providing quality education, to solve the problem of overlapping of non-core specialties in higher educational institutions etc. Of course, these measures are not very popular; furthermore, they have to be undertaken rather promptly and stringently; however, in the long term they can turn out to be right to a great extent.

In our country the problem of underfunding of education has always been acute. According to various estimates, provision of budget funding to educational institutions covers only 25–40% of the calculated

normative demand. In connection with the transfer of significant percentage of educational institutions into jurisdiction of the subjects of the Russian Federation in 2005 the federal budget expenditure on education was reduced. The national project "Education" has somewhat improved the situation; however, it can hardly be considered a systems solution, but rather it is a form of redistribution of budget funds in the sphere of education.

Before the 1970s the Soviet Union was one of the two countries with the highest spending on education, together with the United States. "During the specified period our country allocated 10–12% of the national income to education from the national budget. By the 1980s the Soviet Union had lost its leading position in this sphere; in 1985 spending on education amounted to 6% and in 1995 – to 3.6% of the expenditure budget, including 2% spent on higher education" [5, 6].

Today the budget funding of education in Russia is below the European level. "At present, the Russian educational system receives almost 300 billion rubles, which is 5% of GDP, from the state, the society, and the population." [7] If carefully analyzed, this quotation evidently demonstrates the state policy of withdrawal from the sphere of education. At least, it is proposed to share funding with the society and the population. Taking into account that these two categories are quite amorphous with respect to implementation of the funding tasks, it is clear that, first of all, this refers to an increase in the paid education sector. Since it is expected that investments in educational institutions have to be made in the form of co-financing, it is clear that higher educational institutions are invited to earn money by themselves. And for many higher educational institutions there would be nothing wrong about it were it not for an important reservation that "the major part of additional resources will start coming from family budgets and funds of enterprises," which, in combination, will "help to mobilize extra-budgetary funds of educational institutions" [7]. In practice this means taking funds away from the population and institutions of higher education. Moreover, it happens under conditions when the majority of higher educational institutions use the earned money to support their personnel and academic and teaching staff members, compensating for what is underprovided into this sphere by the state. Furthermore, the problem of salaries of higher educational institutions teaching staff absolutely falls

out of the ongoing reform in a rather strange way, as if there were no problems in this regard.¹

At present, only 25–30% of families can be potentially involved in financing their children's education [7]. And all this takes place on the background of the dramatic expansion of the paid education sector, the number of students in which exceeds the number of students in budget-funded programs of education, according to A.A. Fursenko, Minister of Education and Science. According to forecasts, under conditions of the general reduction in the number of students the number of students enrolled in fee-paid and budget-funded education in 2015 will be approximately the same [3].

The reform ideologists continuously try to impress the public with an opinion that the trend towards an increase in the share of paid education is the worldwide line of the liberal approach to education, which we are called to follow. In fact, the situation is just the opposite. In the majority of European countries (apart from Great Britain) higher education is mostly free; moreover, in a number of countries it is secured by the basic laws of the country.² Introduction of paid education in European countries is performed very gradually and the education fees remain quite low by the standards of our country. For example, in Germany the fee is approximately 1000 Euro per year. Moreover, this amount includes a so-called registration fee entitling students to a very serious bonus system (including transport and catering in student canteens, which does not exceed a certain fixed low amount). Nevertheless, in Germany itself the population constantly protests against the system of paid education, considering it a threat to availability of education to all segments of the population. There is a Chinese scenario as well. In China all higher education is paid for; however, the fee to be paid is rather low. Moreover, there is a well-developed bonus system, which makes it possible to free students from payment, for example, in case they choose an unpopular specialty that is demanded by the state.

Undoubtedly, paid education has to exist in the framework of the market economy; however, to ensure

¹ During reformation of the police force in our country it was indicated from the very beginning that salaries were to be increased up to 30–40 thousand rubles.

² For example, it applies to Finland, which is in many respects considered the European education leader.

at least the minimum level of fairness the state has to develop a system of educational loans, which in our country is implemented in a very weak form and is characterized by interest rates that in reality can be used by relatively well-off families. In market conditions the state cannot “take away” money from the prosperous; it has either to set the maximum price level or, which is our state absolutely able to do, to take it upon itself to pay for loans for particularly distinguished graduate students or students going into unpopular sectors demanded by the society. It would be an additional incentive for students to study and develop the sectors of education that are unpopular for one reason or another. In our country, where graduates receive a state diploma regardless of the form of education, it is especially important, among other things, for international recognition of the quality of this diploma.

Private higher educational institutions, following the demands of the market, are unlikely to develop “heavy” fundamental specialties requiring a significant contribution to providing such education. It is no accident that precedents of opening private higher educational institutions in fundamental areas of science are extremely rare, even in case they are financially supported by the private capital. Organization of higher education based on private investments only can pay no attention to the production and industrial tasks that are vital for the country’s development. Therefore, there has to be a powerful state component in education in order to optimize and stimulate flows of students into the spheres of education that are necessary for the state, although, they may appear not so interesting for the individual. Support of education related to fundamental sciences is of special importance as the majority of the most advanced technologies are developed as a result of fundamental scientific research carried out in universities; moreover, innovative technologies can increase the productivity of labor at a scale of society at large and, therefore, improve the quality of life and, consequently, reduce the existing social tension.

Undoubtedly, in market economy conditions education “has to take into account supply and demand mechanisms... as shown by experience of all market economy countries, the state makes every effort to ensure priority support of education” [8]. Despite searching for additional sources of funding education, none of the developed countries abandons state support of education. According to the report of the World

Bank [9], state support of higher education has to increase; it is also noted that the principal reasons for the danger of education transition are primarily related to private funding. Our country is behind not only in terms of actual funding of education but even with respect to projects that propose to bring it least to the level of survival. As a result of the above described processes there is a gradual shift in the society from the previously dominant views of education as a benefit at the expense of the state to views of education as a service and a subject of purely economic relations. This idea is characteristic for “the majority of economically active population. At the same time, the society has not yet reached the necessary level of confidence between the authors of the educational system, i.e. the state, and the population, between enterprises and higher educational institutions, between higher educational institutions, enterprises, and individual employees or future specialists” [10].

Abandonment of the state policy in education is fraught with serious social consequences related to a growth in the population differentiation, when education ceases to function as a “social elevator” allowing even a low-income part of the population to break, at least, into the middle class. This fact is already recognized by specialists whom we consider belonging to the liberal wing of the reform and who have suddenly started talking about “restoration of education.” Restoration after what? Is it restoration after destruction? But the reform has been going on for more than a decade and is aimed to transform the previous system. What is it that has been destroyed? Is it the old Soviet system? Or is it a newly created and yet uncompleted system of education?

Special problems have arisen in the sphere of humanities education, which is particularly important, taking into account the radical changes in the whole system of values in our country. The previously established value orientations regulating social activities of citizens have been destroyed. The society has failed to develop new life orientations capable of inspiring masses. This situation can be described as a state of “humanitarian crisis,” which, according to expert evaluations, manifests itself in strengthening of anti-social norms of behavior and rising crime. Humanities education begins to be considered not as fundamental and requiring in-depth study of the laws of social life and man, but as something superficial and easy to reach. This idea manifests itself in the opening of more and more new educational institutions

specializing in humanities, which are often based on principles of fast and easy issuance of diplomas.

It is necessary to understand that fundamental education cannot be reduced only to mathematics and natural sciences; it is also connected to fundamental fields of humanities and socioeconomic sciences. Moreover, today it is possible to talk about new relationships between natural sciences and humanities, which are in compliance with the worldwide integrative trends. Sociology, economics, management, and political science today can no longer exist without mathematical calculations and models. At the same time, according to the definition, humanities, first of all, as a set of sciences about man are today in great demand by the society as humanity is becoming one of the most important principles of co-existence of cultures and peoples, ensuring dialogue between cultures, religions, and individuals.

The task that comes to the fore is not simply to support humanities but to perform fundamental humanization of the entire educational system, in which it is necessary to take the human factor into account. In this respect, Russian traditions of education philosophy today take on special significance. Unfortunately, in our country the education reform has become a negative rather than a positive factor of development, revealing the accumulated problems but offering no effective measures for their solution.

Since the reform takes place within the framework of the general globalization process, both because of this and because of its culture-forming nature education is in the midst of modern culture transformation processes (for more detail see [11]). Modern trends implemented in the course of education modernization in Russia, forming a component of the world globalization process, alongside with advantages of creating a common educational space, threaten the national features of the educational system, destroying its quality. In the world there is a process of economization of education taking place. This process is considered one of the most important conditions for economic growth; there is even a new term “cognitive capitalism” related to cognitive economy, whereas the society is defined as a knowledge-based society (*Wissensgesellschaft* in German and *société de la connaissance* in French). Marx is recalled again because long ago he wrote about knowledge becoming an independent productive force. Education begins to be considered a factor of sustainable development. It is

no accident that the latest economic crisis, for example, in the United States was accompanied not by a decrease but, on the contrary, by an increase in budget funding of education as one of the mechanisms to overcome the crisis. Today the educational level of the population is an extremely important factor of sustainable development of any country.

“Today, economic growth is as much a process of accumulation of knowledge as a process of accumulation of capital” [16, pp. 7–8]. However, economization of education is not commercialization of education as it is sometimes interpreted in our country, when the first thing that is desired from education is quick returns from unrestrained expansion of the paid education sector aimed at making financial profits. It is a dead end for the country; this scenario will inevitably follow the laws of the market, which means that it will develop only those spheres of education that are cost-effective. Moreover, taking into account the market formation conditions in our country, this can contribute to a dramatic decline in the quality of education and in many respects represents a delayed system of “selling” higher education diplomas.

Economization of education (in opposition to commercialization) considers education, first of all, as an extremely important part of the general economic mechanism of the country not from the perspective of direct profit but from the perspective of long-term consequences of development of education, which in future can generate profit that cannot be compared to direct commercialization as a result of implementation of discoveries and innovations based, first of all, on fundamental sciences. From the point of direct commercialization there is no need for classical philology, for Latin or ancient Greek, for an ability to understand the problems of philosophy, and even for theoretical branches of physics or pure mathematics. These disciplines make no direct profit. And very often people speaking on behalf of the reforms propose to “scale down” such disciplines or to cut them down significantly. When interpreted as a branch of economy that has to make profits and act as a service sector, economization of education can lead to a reduction not only in humanities sectors of education, but also in theoretical natural science education simply because they cannot make expected quick profits.

The ideology of the education modernization process was based on the task to liberalize the previous education management system and bring its

mechanisms in conformity with the new social and economic conditions. In fact it was a political formulation of the question, which did not pay much attention to the expert opinion. Since the majority of the reformers can be considered followers of the Anglo-Saxon model, it was this model that was forced upon the state in our country. For some reason in this situation no one paid attention to the experience of our European neighbors, for example, Germany or France. After all, both the countries have extremely strong educational systems that still exist. Moreover, in many respects the classical university education system was historically taken by our country from nowhere but Germany. Accordingly, the Soviet model (which was also close to the German model in terms of organization, especially with regard to its management system) was labeled as administrative, although, not as just a different model of management but with judgmental conclusions, often of an ideological nature. Such an approach always blinkers objective vision and makes it impossible to find both negative and positive aspects in one model and in the other, opposite model as well.

Often the very ideas proposed in a new model of education were quite reasonable and understandable; however, ideological absolutization of these ideas related to particular socio-historical conditions gave results that were not always positive. As a result (though, of course, it was not explicitly stated) the central idea of modernization under conditions of the emerging market economy was to reject the principle of fundamental character of education, which dominated in the previous model and which is a characteristic feature of classical universities all over the world.

When criticizing the negative features of the old administrative model (it was rigidly managed, closed to change, and oriented at the military-industrial complex; there was a common ideology in all humanities disciplines etc.), it was necessary not to close eyes on the positive aspects of this model and to keep them including, in particular, the focus of the old model on the interests of the society and the state. For example, the principle of accessibility of education was very efficiently implemented in the administrative model. Today, on the contrary, the model promoted by people who call themselves liberals and even democrats is based on elimination of the full and equal access to education. It provides a freedom of choice only in appearance, whereas in fact it very severely

restricts the implementation of this choice, which is in many respects determined by financial abilities. It is necessary to understand that it is a source of social differentiation of the population, which can cause infinitely more complex problems than the selection of ways for development of education.

Thus, this line of “beautiful ideas” self-destructs due to the unprepared social conditions.

Below I will provide another example. An extremely attractive idea about developing independence of higher educational institutions was put forward. But what did it lead to? At the first stage under conditions of underfunding it actually resulted in selling and renting areas belonging to higher educational institutions. However, to be fair it should be noted that this measure made it possible to compensate for underfunding of the personnel and academic and teaching staff members. However, it did nothing to improve the quality of education. Later, when higher educational institutions came to understand their financial opportunities arising under these new conditions and related to training of specialists on a commercial basis, it led to the opening of a great number of low-quality educational institutions. At that moment it was still possible to support state institutions of higher education, allowing them to respond to the demands of the education market, at the same time, strictly preserving the framework of their core specialties. It did not happen; instead the government issued the infamous degree prohibiting state higher educational institutions to take more than 20% fee-paying students of the total admission number. However, the demand for specialists persisted and it was satisfied through the establishment of a great number of commercial higher educational institutions (first of all, specializing in law and economics) and the opening of non-core specialties in the existing higher educational institutions. Such situation did not last long; however, the country has not been able to overcome the results until this day. Thus, the reckless implementation of a seemingly liberal-democratic principle produced the absolutely opposite effect.

It was proposed to abandon the very concept of “the educational standard” and regulation of the number of educational programs performed by the Ministry. It was postulated that the opening and existence of educational programs should be regulated by the demands of the society, including the educational services market system. However, the society repre-

sented by governmental institutions simply did not have time to deal with this issue due to presence of other, equally important problems. Thus, the market of educational services became the main regulating force, which only increased the deformation of the educational system and its pull back from focusing on fundamental science. Correspondingly, in this model the state does not provide funding of education in general as such but only funding of projects that are considered priority from the viewpoint of the objectives of market economy and the specific people taking corresponding decisions. This decision was not implemented in full, in particular, due to resistance of educational institutions (first of all, classical universities).

Liberal reformers were continuously impeded by a weak support from experts, i.e., in fact, from the colleagues of many of them. And then a mechanism appealing to mass consciousness was used (it is also a classical method that has been applied in the course of many reforms worldwide). An idea that development of education in the country is hindered by corruption in higher educational institutions is thrown into the society. Corruption was indeed there, as it was everywhere across the country. In this context education could not remain a kind of “pure” sector inside the general corrupt system, especially as there were a lot of various reasons for that, including in a number of cases miserable existence of the academic and teaching staff of higher educational institutions. However, in this situation it was a powerful PR stunt relying on the fact that the majority of the country’s population is in one way or another involved in education, which means that there will always be a significant number of “the offended.”

Thus, instead of fighting the reasons for corruption in the sphere of education the main adversaries were determined, including the administrative system of management of higher educational institutions, the management of higher educational institutions at all levels almost in person, and, of course, the academic and teaching staff themselves involved in the process. Then, there was a proposal to introduce a mechanism that had to put an end to this phenomenon in the sphere of education, namely, the system of USE (Unified State Exam) – SRFO (State Registered Financial Obligations).³ This idea was based on a fundamental change in the system of higher education funding.

³ SRFO stands for State Registered Financial Obligations or educational vouchers.

According to the USE results, higher educational institutions had to switch to per capita funding. It is a kind of voucherization of higher education, which eventually also failed.

Again, the idea that USE-type examinations are almost a major international practice was forced upon the society. However, it is not true, as even in countries that have similar forms of testing school children’s knowledge such examinations are not the only form of admission to higher educational institutions, but at best represent a part of the general system. In a pure form an examination in the form of the USE still exists only in Egypt and in China, although, in the latter it is also criticized. In Germany the gymnasium educational system, ensuring admission to higher educational institutions, is radically different from relying on any single examination; it includes a great number of different parameters for evaluation of gymnasium students’ knowledge. It should be also taken into account that approximately 30% of school students go to gymnasiums, whereas the remaining percentage interrupt their school education at lower stages and cannot apply to higher educational institutions immediately.

I will provide only one example of inefficiency of the Unified State Exam as a mechanism to eliminate corruption. All the years of the reform did not lead to elimination of the “higher educational institutions – army” link, which in many respects put the correct steps of the reform back into the same field of corruption, as many young people and their parents saw admission to higher educational institutions as a way to get exemption from military service. It was done instead of establishing a strong system of benefits for people who had completed compulsory military

⁴ There is another example related to this problem. As a result of criticism, unjustly reducing the system of preparatory departments to ideological selection of personnel, it was destroyed. And yet in the period of the Soviet Union this system functioned as a social compensatory elevator, allowing, first of all, those young people who had served in the army to find themselves among students of the leading higher educational institutions of the country. The reformers do not like to talk (or simply do not know) about it, but representatives of higher education from some Nordic countries came to Russia to see the Rabfak (workers’ university) system of, for example, Moscow University. I can be confident about it as I myself entered Moscow State University through a preparatory department after serving in the army. Later, when I already was MSU Pro-rector for Academic Policy, I also participated in negotiations on this subject.

service, including, for example, free admission to any higher educational institution (including commercial institutions), which, by the way, would also help to solve the problem of quality of the formed army contingent. In fact, the increase in the paid education sector resulted in the creation of a system of military service evasion, primarily, for children from well-off families.⁴ In turn, this desire to be admitted to a higher educational instruction was answered by deformation of the content of school education, which was gradually turning from a factor of acquiring knowledge (especially in senior school years) into a transfer point for admission to higher educational institutions. The country formed its own model combining the interests of school and higher educational institutions, which was represented by a tutoring system. In a sense, teachers of higher educational institutions, whose work was underfunded by the state, were interested in insufficient quality of the applicants' knowledge as it helped them to support themselves, and even quite well, through the system of tutoring. It also became a source for many corruption schemes. Apart from that, the Unified State Exam as the only criterion of admission to higher educational institutions destroyed the students' motivation to obtain the desired specialty. It manifested itself very clearly in the first year of implementation of such an approach to admission, when school graduates applied to tens of higher educational institutions choosing absolutely different specialties. And, finally, it is possible that one of the main long-term effects of the USE can be represented by destruction of the system of school education based on a transfer of knowledge. The point is that due to the deformation of the process of admission to higher educational institutions in our country the final years of school education inevitably turn into "stuffing" for the USE tasks instead of the process of transferring knowledge.

As a form of additional control the Unified State Exam is undoubtedly an acceptable mechanism to check the level of school children's knowledge, especially as it has a potential for improvement and is really gradually improving. The principal objection to it is that the USE cannot be the only condition for admission to higher educational institutions. The Unified State Exam cannot give objective results in such a large country as Russia simply because it is too difficult to ensure its "purity" even from the technical point of view alone. Apart from that, Russia is characterized by a sharp differentiation of the popula-

tion both in financial and, most importantly, in social sense. The latter includes, in particular, availability of high quality school education. It should be admitted that the quality of education is hardly equal in different regions of the country. Correspondingly, training of school graduates for admission to higher educational institutions, whether it is based on a standard admission system or the USE, will also be differentiated. In this context the main factor will again be represented by the financial component, not necessarily in the form of bribes but simply as a possibility for additional training aimed at "stuffing" for certain examinations. Apart from that, taking into account the differentiation in the quality of teachers throughout the country and the socioeconomic features characteristic for each region, the very grade for the USE will be dramatically different in weight. It can happen that the highest grade in one region will not be up to the same value in another region. As a result, the focus on justice turns into its opposite, injustice, when higher educational institutions admit applicants according to their "high" grades, whereas their level of knowledge is below the level of some applicants with "lower" grades for the USE.

In combination with the State Registered Financial Obligations (SRFO) the Unified State Exam had at least some theoretical sense; however, there are also a lot of problems arising in this connection. First of all, they are related to the willingness and the possibility of the state to provide higher educational institutions with the corresponding funding in accordance with educational vouchers. Then, there is a danger of hidden manipulation of the USE results. Since the SRFO determine the financial component of the examination, the state will specify the evaluation criterion, for example, depending on the financial situation in the country. We have partly seen it already. For example, in the first year of the USE-based admission to higher educational institutions there was a tacit prescription not to be very strict when checking the tests so as not to cause scandals at the beginning of the campaign. The following year the criteria were more stringent and this time the results were somewhat different. Moreover, it is possible to manipulate these criteria in different regions etc. That is yet another corruption component.

The SRFO idea collapsed almost immediately when the models for proposed financing of the USE results were published. The right column of the table below contains the amounts that were initially approved by the government.

Model for proposed financing of the USE results

Group according to USE results	Radical scenario, thousand rubles	Moderate scenario, thousand rubles	Approved for 2002, thousand rubles
A+	18.7	13.3	9.375
A	10.6	10.6	7.5
B	5.3	5.3	3.75
C	2.7	4.3	3.0
D	0.0	0.0	0.75

As can be seen from the table, even the radical scenario proposed an amount below 20 thousand rubles, which was much lower than the costs of paid education, which had already started developing rapidly. As a result of public criticism the amount was adjusted, approved by categories for the period till 2010, and averaged close to the amount of indicated in the moderate scenario.

The first experiment on admission to higher educational institutions based on the Unified State Exam was held in only six institutions of higher education from three subjects of the Russian Federation [the Mari El Republic, the Chuvash Republic, and the Sakha (Yakutia) Republic], which by itself makes it impossible even to talk about certain “purity” of the experiment. Firstly, only a small number of higher educational institutions took part in this experiment but, most importantly, the leading institutions of higher education were not among the participants, which immediately called the “purity” of the experiment into question, which was confirmed later. If the reformers were really sure in the correctness of this model, the first necessary step was to compel the leading higher educational institutions to participate in the experiment. The experiment based on such sampling and such a number of participants was simply invalid; all the more, it was unacceptable to generalize its results for application throughout the country.

The idea that was “beautiful” in theory and the reformers’ logic saying that the better USE results a school graduate will have, the higher amount will be allocated for to the higher educational institution, which in total will exceed budget funding, completely failed. It turned out that the calculated SRFO norms per capita did not correspond to the actual costs of higher educational institutions, especially universities. Therefore, there was one more consequence. It was

very soon found out that the educational voucher amount was not sufficient to apply to the leading institutions of higher education, in which the education cost was much higher. In other words, applicants who cannot pay the balance, even if they have very high USE results, are in fact “cut off” from the leading higher educational institutions of the country. Moreover, it is highly probable that they will take their vouchers to higher educational institutions, in which such an amount will be sufficient to cover all costs, and these institutions are not always very strong. In other words, in reality it can lead to the formation of a mechanism supporting not strong but weak institutions of higher education. However, the most important aspect is that it will become an additional source of social inequality because for applicants from wealthy families the costs will remain negligible regardless of the additional payment, whereas for school graduates from low-income families they will remain high enough not to try to apply to strong higher educational institutions.

Ya.I. Kuz'minov [12] proposed to return to taking into account the school certificate average. This form existed in the Soviet time and was cancelled as a result of the perestroika reforms. It was absolutely rightly noted that “the main danger” of the Unified State Exam is “the reduction in the number of additional school subjects” [12]. The critics of the reforms continuously stated that as a result of the reforms school would turn into a system of “stuffing” for the USE. Ya.I. Kuz'minov also supported the system of competitions in different school subjects as a means of selection to higher educational institutions, although this idea at that time appeared in “conservative” universities as a way to provide at least some adjustment of the USE results. According to the rector, the average number of entrants admitted to Russian higher educational institutions reaches 800 thousand young people a year, including 20 thousand admitted based on the results of school competitions. “This figure is too low for Russia. It has to reach at least 5% of the admission number, which is 35–40 thousand annually,” the expert says [12].

Summing up the preliminary results, we can say that the education reform, firstly, transfers the process of education from the field of state support, especially with respect to fundamental education associated with costs for laboratory equipment, practical training etc., into the field of self-support, which is easier to achieve in case of the market demanded professions. It is not

taken into account that losses, which are inevitable in this situation in the sphere of fundamental education, in ten years' time can turn out incommensurably greater, including the financial aspect. This means mass transition to paid education.

Secondly, the SRFO system provided an opportunity to study free of charge only to those school graduates who had the highest grade for their school tests. The others, in any case, will have to pay the balance, which can reach up to 100% of the education costs, depending on their grades. Moreover, students will be unable to change this situation during the whole period of studying at the higher educational institution, even assuming they are brilliant. Everything is determined once and for all at the moment of taking school graduation examinations.

Thirdly, due to the introduction of the SRFO, a great number of young boys and girls are immediately "cut off" from the opportunity to receive higher education not because they are not capable enough, but because they graduate from ordinary "unadvanced" schools (which are in majority in our country, especially in rural areas) and their parents cannot afford tutors. In this situation education ceases to function as a "social elevator," allowing any individual to participate in the educational process due to its general availability. And this fact is a source of personal human tragedies, which can exacerbate social contradictions even further. To justify this situation a point is raised that education is divided into mass and elite. Imperfect mass education is intended for the majority of the Russian citizens, whereas high quality elite education is for the wealthy upper class, which in many respects has come true, especially in the central regions of the country and in Moscow, if we talk about the market demanded specialties of, for example, lawyers or economists. Eventually, this raises a threat of a reduction in the general educational potential of the society and the country's loss of the previously occupied positions in science.

Fourthly, the anti-corruption argument turned out to be pointless. Today it is confirmed by a lot of facts of the establishment of a new corruption system based on opportunities provided by the Unified State Exam. Corruption has simply taken a new form, moving to a higher level of bureaucracy. After a series of scandals people started talking about the necessity to increase control, which will probably be always needed in our country; however, it could have been very well implemented using the expended money within the

framework of the traditional model of students' admission to higher educational institutions. Attempts to create some "independent" commissions will be equally inefficient, as in this case transparency of this examination will be even lower and decisions will be taken by officials selected on the basis of some unclear principles.

Fifthly, as a mechanism for selection of applicants to higher educational institutions the USE has turned out to be very costly as, apart from the necessary funds allocated to higher educational institutions for teaching of students, it requires money to implement the examination, including funds to control "the purity" of this implementation, which involves security bodies into the process. Thus, the federal budget expenditure on the USE in 2001–2004 reached approximately 1.8 billion rubles. It is clear that today this amount is much higher. In its time, funding of the SRFO program amounted to 88 million rubles.

It is hard to imagine what could have happened if there were no "conservative" containment of the education reform policy [13]. Today, the society has woken up as the number of scandals and their sophistication lead not only to financial expenses but to serious moral consequences, although scientists and experts have been warning about possible consequences for the last decade. To be admitted to higher educational institutions at all costs becomes a norm of conduct both for children and their parents. The emphasis is made not on motivation for the choice of specialty but on success in solution of this market situation, in which it is acceptable to make use of good luck, lucky chances, deceits, and, of course, corruption schemes involving both children and their parents.

The second link of education modernization is related to Russia's accession to the so-called Bologna process, which means a transition to such a model of education that will become uniform for the entire European educational space. It is symptomatic that the Bologna process was initiated by ministers of education, but not educational institutions themselves. In June 1999 the education ministers of 29 European countries signed the Bologna declaration. In 2003 the parties to the Bologna process included already as many as 40 countries, Russia among them.

In the most developed countries, which have their own traditions of university education (France, Germany, Italy etc.), rectors of the largest universities are very cautious about this process and they insist on

maintaining the national priorities of the country's own educational systems. For example, a number of well-known French institutes, which are not subject to the Ministry, in fact ignore this declaration. The rectors of higher educational institutions in the Nordic countries display passive resistance to this process, relying on the fact that too much time will pass between making of decisions and implementing them on site. It is hard to imagine that Germany will fully abandon the traditional university system of education based on the land autonomy of the German universities.

It is hard to argue the Bologna principles at the level of declarations. It declares expanded access to European education and increased mobility of students and teachers. The common European educational space is a very good idea. However, in this context it is necessary to understand that unity should not mean identity; on the contrary, it suggests a complex and flexible model, including various subsystems. Unification that is forced upon us inevitably reduces the quality level of education as it suggests orientation at the average level. The main condition for integration has to be "equality" of systems, both economic and cultural. However, it is very hard to integrate systems that are not equal in cultural and economic respect. Therefore, when we talk about integration of the educational process, the idea of gaining higher quality and new advantages has to be of paramount importance. There is a great French system of education and there is a very strong German model. Finally, there is the Russian educational system, which in many respects is not inferior to other systems. Why give up our advantages? The Bologna process documents do not force any country to perform mechanical integration; in fact they declare very general principles, making it possible to take into account special features of the national educational systems. However, unfortunately, in our country these principles are implemented by governmental officials, for whom it is easier to simplify any reformation process to the limit.

It is Russia that initially tried to implement the most primitive way of integration, actually ruining the national system of education and, above all, university education. In December 2002, at an international conference held in St. Petersburg the Russian Minister of Education spoke a surprising phrase, "I apologize to my colleagues from the European Council and UNESCO but I have to say frankly that I believe that **our higher educational institutions will lose much**

due to Russia's accession to the Bologna process. (Highlighted by the author of the article). However, neither can we stay away from this process. Now that more than thirty countries have already signed the Bologna declaration, $\frac{1}{4}$ Russia cannot be left out of this circle" [14]. Moreover, it was said by a person whom I greatly respect and consider a very worthy minister. It is clear that the reform ideology was behind it; for this ideology the intrinsic value of our educational system was second in importance. Within the framework of the reform ideas we easily abandoned our system of post-graduate education and agreed that bachelors could study for either three or four years, whereas master programs could continue for either a year or two years.

Russian education has been always based on fundamental science. It was expressed by consecutive teaching of the specialization subject to students, which was unlike the mosaic system implemented in many other countries. It suggests that students begin their acquaintance with academic schools very early due to their early specialization, which starts in their second year of education. Students get involved into the work of the department almost immediately; they enter a scientific team and work on scientific subjects together with graduate and post-graduate students. That is where schools of science later originate. The leading Russian universities took part in integrative educational processes long before and independently of the Bologna innovations. Every strong university in Russia has its own specific character, which makes it possible to talk about different schools of science complementing each other.

The Bologna process represents a type of integration of the European educational space, which inevitably simplifies higher education (makes it more mass-oriented). It is one of geopolitical tasks, which in Europe, strange as it may seem, is aimed against Americanization as a manifestation of unipolarity of the modern world.

Russia's accession to the Bologna process should not be an end in itself but should represent a process of natural integration into the common European educational space in the foreseeable future by expanding possibilities of academic mobility and accessibility of the Russian educational market for international students. It will require significant changes in the state policy in the sphere of education, standards and forms of education, organization of the educational process, and knowledge quality control. However, in this

context it is important to understand that it is a part of the general globalization process, which, alongside with benefits, presents previously unseen dangers of suppressing the national cultures and traditions, including the sphere of education.

Unlike the programs for training of specialists, bachelor programs existing in the majority of European countries, as a rule, do not involve specialization in a particular area of science. The bachelor program graduates are awarded a degree of Bachelor of Science (which covers all natural and exact sciences) or Bachelor of Arts (humanities). Within the framework of the “certified specialist” qualification our education implied early specialization (as a rule, starting in the second year of education), which makes education deep and fundamental. The reform will inevitably result in a decrease in the degree of fundamentality of education at the bachelor level and it will be impossible to catch up on it at the master level due to the small number of academic hours. In this connection there is a number of questions, including, for example, whether the bachelor degree will be in demand on the Russian labor market as a relevant qualification. I think not, as there are simply no corresponding legislative acts for that. Bachelor programs are nothing more than prolonged school education, allowing young people to adapt to market conditions. But what is to be done with fundamental science taught at classical universities? Is it possible to become a philologist specializing in German studies or classical philology after three or four years of general philology and two years of specialization within the framework of the master program?

Such problems have been already faced by other countries, for example, Germany and France. It suddenly happened that bachelors, whose existence was declared as demanded by the market, turned out to be unwanted on the labor market [15]. In Germany it caused fierce debates, as a result of which the mass switch to the Bologna system was suspended.

Introduction of the system of credits into the educational system is declared as a means to ensure mobility, which implies that the system of students' evaluation will be transparent throughout Europe.

The principle of mobility, meaning free movement and access to educational opportunities in the European region, is very good; however, for our country in many respects it is designed more for psychology of young students. The solution of this

problem is expansion of the visa area, which is not directly related to implementation of the stated integration principles. There are options for solution of these problems bilaterally such as, for example, an agreement between Russia and Germany, allowing teachers, students, and cultural figures from one country visit the other without a visa. Unless the visa regime is simplified, no declaration on educational credits or availability of education will help. It can be implemented within Europe and it has been working there for a long time already, but is Europe really ready to let in a lot of Russians? Are we ready to provide adequate conditions, first of all, living conditions for visiting students, if in Moscow, for example, unlike Paris, the entire hotel system is focused on four- and five-star hotels, whereas mid-level and cheap accommodation affordable for students is almost completely absent. Will European students from many countries, education in which is mostly free, come to our country to study?

The Bologna process proposes an integrative educational system, which in a number of parameters has to be similar in many European countries. Correspondingly, the integrative system simply cannot be built upon the elite principle, for the minority, but it should take into account the possibilities and interests of the majority, including social needs and the market economy demands. It is absolutely clear that the creation of a relatively uniform educational space cannot be based on the initially high educational level. That is exactly why the quality of higher education can be achieved only due to organizational transformations and requirements and stringent regulations. It is these measures that can ensure, at least, no decrease in the general level of higher education with respect to its highest standards in the classical system.

It is no accident that an analysis of publications on the Bologna process demonstrates that authors often make a reservation that they talk not so much about the quality of education as such but “about the mechanisms, procedures, and technologies that guarantee all higher educational institutions and labor markets to provide... the level of quality that inspires confidence” [16]. It is a “brilliant” formulation, putting everything into place, in which the central word is “confidence.” I’m not being ironic; in fact, involvement of a great number of countries into the Bologna process under conditions when, for example, in our country institutions of higher education pop up like mushrooms, raises a problem not of the quality of

education but of, at least, confidence in the diploma, i.e. achievement of a certain minimum point in ensuring quality.

Concluding the analysis of some specific features of the Bologna process I cannot but give my favorite quote, “Ah, Bologna, you are a fine city, in which many proud towers argue with each other about which one is the most beautiful, how could you become a symbol of the bulldozer that will level the variety of subjects and teaching methods on our entire territory? After the failure of the orthography reform, the ruling ignorance at the level of the Federation and the lands once more agreed to be deceived by the putschist impostor “reformers.” Due to the low learning rate of our system now we are introducing bachelor/master programs, which we will cancel in a few years when none of the set objectives has been achieved” [17].

Therefore, summing up the above, we can draw the following conclusions.

In our country the education reform was not prepared theoretically; it did not pass the approbation of the scientific and academic community; it was based on the results of an unreliable experiment; it represented implementation of liberal ideas; moreover, even liberalism itself in this context was interpreted one-sidedly. This reform was carried out inconsistently; it was more a destruction of the positive aspects of our education that had always been there. Maybe, in future within the framework of the mentioned specific character of Russian reformation as a process of constant fluctuations between reformation and counter-reformation, there will be certain mitigation in its implementation. It has already happened when certain pools of universities have been selected and allowed to conduct additional examinations; when school subject competitions have taken an important place in selection of applicants to higher educational institutions. It seems that soon school children will be given the right to choose between the Unified State Exam and other form of admission or consideration of school certification results. That is to say that there will be some development, though, going not as fast as we would like it to. At the same time, it is necessary to understand that in Russia the amplitudes of fluctuations in the process of reformation are becoming too large, which can “destroy the system integrity of the society and the state. In this connection it is possible to suggest that this cycle of reforms and counter-reforms, currently experienced by Russia, is

likely to be the final one as the human and natural resources for such a wasteful method of political and economic development in many respects have been already exhausted” [18].

In this situation a special correcting importance is given to the right choices, including the theoretical sense. Decisions in the sphere of education due to its culture forming nature, which means that education affects all aspects of social life, should not be taken by a certain monopolistic group (whether it be liberals or conservatives), but should be implemented on the basis of preliminary expert evaluations and broad public discussions. It appears that the highest authority should be distanced from participating in discussions of the education reform to a certain extent; moreover, despite all their importance, educational policy decisions should not be supported by the authority of the government so as to leave a possibility for their immediate modification. The government should not take on an appearance complying with the periods of fluctuations of reformation and counter-reformation waves in the process of modernization; to a certain extent, it should be above “the battle of discussions.”

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