

THE PROSPECTS FOR PARTICIPATION OF RUSSIAN EXPAT SCIENTISTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN SCIENCE

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The conference of representatives of Russia's academic diaspora that took place in late 2014 was second of its kind held over the past four years. It demonstrated the prominent role played by the new foreign political and economic contexts in shaping the views on the current situation and the format for further cooperation for the promotion of Russian science. Judging by the viewpoints expressed by representatives of Russia's academic diaspora, it is feasible at present to revive the practice of small-scale initiatives and projects that do not require lengthy visits of foreign-based scientists to Russia, while at the same time being capable of attracting substantial help for domestic research organizations and teams. The possible scenarios for cooperation development were presented.

In December 2014, the second conference of representatives of Russia's academic diaspora in foreign countries took place, its agenda addressing the 'points of growth for the Russian sciences' and the future opportunities for Russian-speaking scientists to do something in Russia and for the benefit of Russia. The first conference with an almost identical representation of participants had been held in 2010, and so the comparison of these two events can yield information on the changes that had occurred over the past 4 years in terms of the Russian-speaking academic diaspora participating in the development of science in this country. The amount of federal budget allocations to research and development had been steadily increasing from year to year, thus making it possible for the RF government to constantly expand the various available forms of cooperation with representatives of Russia's academic diaspora. Several government measures have been introduced in order to provide support to science and attract representatives of the academic diaspora into this country: the mega-grant program¹; the program for rendering support to joint science project directed by representatives of the academic diaspora; the program designed to ensure, by 2020, that five Russian universities should be placed on the world's Top 100 list². And finally, in 2014 the Russian Scientific Fund held a contest for the best international laboratory project, where foreign scientists may constitute up to half of the laboratory's staff. The development institutions (RVC, Skolkovo Foundation, *Rusnano*) commissioned representatives of Russia's academic diaspora to review the submitted applica-

tions for grants and projects, while Russian universities began to more often invite foreign scientists to deliver lectures and participate in various academic events held within their walls.

However, the year 2013 saw the launch of reform in the academic system, which inevitably had its impact on the outlooks and frame of mind of Russia's academic community. The dramatic developments in the economy and on the international political arena that took place in 2014 had also affected the field of science – information began to pour from various sources about the resumed outflow of human resources from this country, especially young researchers. So, the second meeting of representatives of the academic diaspora took place in a very different situation. On the one hand, the Russian-speaking scientists working abroad had received substantial political and financial support from the Russian government over the past 4 years. On the other hand, the new economic conditions imposed some constraints on the participation of the academic diaspora in Russia-based activities. These new conditions are not limited to the plummeting exchange rate of the national currency and the resulting soaring cost of scientific experiments based on the use of foreign-made appliances, equipment and materials; an additional strain has been imposed by the introduction of new legal norms that have made it more difficult for foreigners to operate in Russia. First of all, it is the necessity to inform the Federal Migration Service of Russia of an individual's second citizenship³. This requirement is relevant for those scientists who, while retaining Russian citizenship, have been granted citizenship or residence permit in another country.

1 Big grants earmarked for the establishment of laboratories at Russian higher educational establishments headed by the world's leading scientists.

2 The so-called Program 5/100/2020; in its framework, 15 universities are creating, among other things, international laboratories, funded by substantial budget allocations.

3 Federal Law of 4 June 2014, No 142-FZ 'On the Introduction of Alterations into Articles 6 and 30 of the Federal Law "On Citizenship of the Russian Federation" and Some Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation'. See <http://www.rg.ru/2014/06/06/grajdanstvo-dok.html>

All these changes will be determining the actual forms of cooperation with Russia's academic diaspora. The inevitability of evolution was explicit in the statements made by its representatives at their December meeting.

When the outlooks expressed in 2010 were set against those of 2014, it became evident that in both instances the representatives of the academic diaspora pointed to a crisis being experienced by Russian science, although the situation in 2010 was, by a number of parameters, better than in late 2014 – among other things, because no attempts of restructuring the academic sector had been undertaken yet, with all their dubious consequences. For academic science, 2014 was a year of survival, not development. As a result, we once again put in circulation the vocabulary of the early 1990s. However, back in 2010 nobody could as yet foresee such a situation, and so the imperfections of the system noted at that time are perceived today as signs of well-being. Then, the Russian-speaking academic diaspora put forth some harsh criticism of the situation of Russian academic science, and in the final resolution issued by the conference participants it is stated as follows: 'The Conference affirms the existence of a deep structural crisis of Russian science, the continuing weakening of its position with regard to global science, and the increasing isolation of Russia in the field of academic science'¹. In this connection, the participants were very skeptical about the newly announced mega-grant contest. Some of them feared that the expert's estimations would be arbitrary, and the entire procedure would be faulty, thus endangering the future prospects for Russia's cooperation with her academic diaspora. However, in 2014 the implementation of the mega-grant program was already noted as one of the most positive developments in the field of Russian science, which yielded numerous mutual benefits. The majority of newly created laboratories were recognized as performing at a highly productive level, promoting progress in the field of science and boosting the image of Russia's science in the eyes of the world academic community. Among the reasons for this lack of criticism, we cannot rule out the fact that many of the participants in the second conference had actually received grants within the framework of that program.

In the course of the first conference, the representatives of Russia's diaspora put forth a number of initiatives to be implemented in Russia, which ranged from setting up an online institute of the academic diaspora to introducing international awards and scholarships.

1 Final Resolution of the Conference // The Destiny of Science and the Russian Academic Diaspora. Materials of the first conference The Academic Diaspora and the Future for Russian Science, European University at St. Petersburg, 24–25 June 2010, p. 101.

In this connection it was continually emphasized that in Russia, the sphere of science is indivisible from the general economic and political situation, and so the core factor of successful long-term and mutually beneficial cooperation would be the creation in this country of a favorable environment not only for research activity, but also for life in general².

In 2014, the new political reality had actually led to a breach of unity within Russia's academic diaspora: it was their attitude to the foreign policy course currently pursued by the RF government that divided academic expatriates into its champions and opponents. So, no single opinion could be shaped with regard to the current political and economic developments, and consequently, no specific measures designed to boost cooperation between scientists could be worked out. It is noteworthy that the majority of participants preferred to view the field of science outside of any political contexts, and to focus instead on the discussion of purely academic issues. This is actually a manifestation of the academic diaspora's inability to realistically plan their future actions, as any developments in the field of academic science are inevitably influenced by the ongoing political processes. The most sincere explanation of the reasons for such an outlook was offered by biophysicist Maxim Frank-Kamenetski³, who said as follows: 'The diaspora, and such people as myself, on top of everything else are now plagued by a very strong fear due to the enactment of the law on 'voluntary but enforced' registration of dual citizenship. If a person fails to get registered within 60 days after his entry into this country, he runs the risk of either administrative or criminal proceedings being initiated against him. So, many people got frightened. I also got frightened: my fear has not been so strong as to prevent me from coming, but sufficiently strong to urge me to get registered. Many of my colleagues and friends abroad are saying plainly that now they will never go to Russia because they are afraid to do so'.

The discussion of the problems faced by Russian science proper demonstrated that most of these problems, believed to be of paramount importance, had not been solved. These include the problem of customs regulation (which determines the speed of delivery and cost of materials and equipment purchased abroad); problems with obtaining a visa; strong bureaucratic constraints imposed on research teams operating under contracts and grant agreements; an

2 A. Vershik, O. Kharkhordin. Foreword // The Destiny of Science and the Russian Academic Diaspora. Materials of the first conference The Academic Diaspora and the Future for Russian Science, European University at St. Petersburg, 24–25 June 2010, p. 7.

3 D. Voltchek. Nепреодолимоe чувствo toшнoты [Overwhelming Nausea] // Radio Liberty, 19 January 2015. See <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/26798941.html>

uneven inflow of budget funding allocated to scientific research, and the rule that the amount allocated should be necessarily spent by the end of a calendar year¹.

A new topic for discussion was posed by the issues emerging as a result of the participation of representatives of the academic diaspora in various Russian projects. It was noted that young people are not adequately trained to participate in research projects; the articles submitted by Russian scientists do not conform to the established contemporary standards for a scientific presentation, while interdisciplinary research projects and research teams capable of implementing them were practically non-existent. Lack of proper access to latest scientific publications at libraries was also noted, as well as the overall need for modernizing the existing research infrastructure. And finally, a number of Russian expatriates with experience in the field of scientific expert's estimations, pointed out the unacceptably short timelines established by Russian research institutions for such procedures. A noteworthy point is that while four years ago many innovation ideas had been put forth, not the bulk of proposals had to do only with improvement of the measures currently implemented by the government.

Indeed, it is not an easy task to launch new measures and at the same time promote cooperation with a partner who is alarmed by the uncertain prospects of that cooperation. In such a situation it would be more reasonable to boost those activities that do not require lengthy visits of foreign scientists to Russia,

while at the same time can render significant aid to Russian research institutions and research teams.

Given the expected budgetary constraints (the result of inevitable cuts in budget allocations to scientific research) and the current political situation, it appears feasible at present to abandon the idea of promotion or launch of costly projects like mega-grants or awards to foreign scientists. It would be more worthwhile to focus on young scientists – those working in Russia, who can be involved in training programs at laboratories run by Russian expatriates abroad, and foreign young scientists who can come and work at Russian research institutions. Young people have higher mobility, and some of them can be assisted in finding prestigious employment at research centers and universities abroad.

On the whole, it appears reasonable to adopt the idea of 'small deeds' that had been actively proclaimed back in 2010. In the present situation, these 'small deeds' could be – with due regard for the accumulated experience of cooperation with foreign academic diasporas in Russia and the newly emerging issues – the editing of articles written by Russian scientists for publication abroad prior to submitting them to foreign reviewers; expert's estimation of applications for grants; participation in the editorial boards of Russian scientific journals and assistance in the elaboration of reviewing procedures; delivery of short-term lecturing courses and participation in the training of postgraduate students. And finally, given the scarcity of available highly qualified experts, another important area of activity would be to involve representatives of Russia's academic diaspora in the discussion of strategic documents on the development of science in their mother country. ●

1 V. Rezunkov, S. Dobrynin. Nauchnaia diaspora: bex politiki? [The Academic Diaspora: No Politics?] 8 December 2014. See <http://www.svoboda.mobi/a/26731993.html>