

*Russia: Internationalization Issues*

policy as a clear violation of the 2002 Law for the Promotion of Private Education, which establishes that private schools and universities are to be privately established and administered.

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In contrast, government officials claim that private universities seek to manipulate official policy in the interest of profit making, in the process damaging or undermining the rights of students and parents. They complain that private universities lack “self-discipline.” Government officials see themselves as standing on higher ground to safeguard student interests and to monitor the behavior of private universities. It is thought that controls are needed or chaos would ensue.

Who is at fault? How can one find the right mix between government control and autonomy for private universities? Private universities see their priorities as based on market needs and believe they should be allowed to operate on market terms, with their admissions policies and program offerings driven and regulated by the market. They stress that they are *not* public universities. In contrast, government officials, who are responsible for potential crises, see education as too sensitive and delicate an arena to allow big mistakes to occur. Therefore, government officials insist on executing close supervision of private higher education. Private university presidents have been asking how government supervision can be maintained without strangling the vitality of private universities. Government officials have been asking how autonomy can be granted to private universities without creating chaos. These are issues that seem very difficult to resolve in China today.

The 2002 Law for the Promotion of Private Education was praised for the support it gave private education. However, in October of last year, participants at a conference in Nanjing bemoaned the fact that the “winter of private education” had set in—first of all because this law had been so very unimplementable. It is called an “immature law,” with many details still under intense debate, especially the clause that “private investors can have a reasonable return on their investment.” While the law makes society believe that they are equal to public universities, private universities still face great difficulty in getting permission from the government to offer bachelor’s degree programs; they are still kept from

admitting students until after public universities have admitted theirs. They can now easily be charged with running “illegal operations,” since many activities that were once considered “borderline” and were dealt with by government offices with “one eye closed and one eye open” have become illegal under the law. Government officials in many local areas have been deliberately vague about their attitudes toward private education.

The new law requires many government offices to make definitive decisions on the performance of private schools and universities. Private universities thus have charged that the new law fails to give private universities the expected protection but rather opens the way for government schools, state banks, and local governments to combine resources to edge out private universities. A sense of crisis has been looming for many private universities, which came into existence in the 1980s and have been growing since then. The collaboration between public universities and local governments in setting up private colleges has instantly taken away the advantages of private institutions, which were able to respond to the needs of the economy with their highly flexible administrative structure and programs.

In summary, the passing of the private higher education law has not created a big boom for private universities. The balance between autonomy and control is hard to maintain. Private universities in China will need many years to establish their credibility and reputation and gain the autonomy they have coveted. They face competition on all fronts and now have an even bigger challenge of surviving the advent of pseudo-private second-tier colleges. ■

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## International Students in Russia

### Anna Smolentseva

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Presently, about 100,000 international students are enrolled at Russian higher education institutions. Their expanding numbers are considered one of the most important trends in Russian tertiary education. Policymakers emphasize that higher education, along with oil, has the potential to become a key export industry in the Russian economy that will earn billions of dollars, as is the case in the United States, Australia, and other countries. However, currently the presence of international students in Russia yields only about U.S.\$150 million annually.

### Overview

The Soviet system of international education had virtually broken down by the early 1990s, and only in recent years has the number of international students in post-Soviet Russia begun to increase. Over the last decade their number has more than doubled, and qualitative change has taken place as well. In Soviet times, most foreign students studied tuition free under intergovernmental agreements. Today, international education is not oriented toward Soviet propaganda, but rather toward economic benefit, which means that the majority of international students pay tuition. Foreign students represent an important source of nonstate financing, which enables many Russian higher education institutions to survive under conditions of financial constraint.

The countries of origin of international students have also changed over the last years. Whereas in the early 1990s, citizens of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)—the countries that were at one time part of the Soviet Union—comprised the majority of international students, at present they make up about one-third of the total number of foreigners studying in Russia. Approximately the same number of students are from Asian countries, mostly China. Other places of origin include the Near East and North Africa (12.8 percent), Europe (7.5 percent), Africa (5 percent), and Latin America (3 percent). But the situation may differ among universities. For example, at Moscow State University, an institution with a strong international reputation, the share of foreigners is about 10 percent of the total student body, almost half of them from the CIS and Baltic countries (45 percent), and another half from Asia (49 percent).

The most popular fields of education for international students have not changed significantly; these remain engineering, medicine, economics, business administration, and the humanities.

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### Great Expectations

A federal policy in support of educating foreign nationals in Russian educational institutions was approved in October 2002 by the president of the Russian Federation and launched by the Ministry of Education. The policy is based on the conviction that Russian institutions of

higher learning have traditionally provided higher education for foreign students and still have the potential to achieve a significant place in international higher education. In Russia, it is believed that the attraction of Russian higher education lies in its high quality, qualified faculty, and comparatively low tuition fees and cost of living. Surveys on international students in Russia have shown that the quality of Russian higher education is one of the most important reasons that foreign students choose to study in Russia.

Russia's active participation in international education and attracting foreign students would support the long-term economic and political interests of Russia in the world and especially in those developing regions that have had strong ties with the USSR, Russia, and Russian education. In addition to the economic benefits, the hope is that Russia will also gain the opportunity to exert political influence in those regions. Thus, the plan is to continue with the system of Russian federal fellowships for foreign students studying in the country. A related effort will be the attempt to expand the influence of the Russian language and Russian culture by establishing a network of Russian centers abroad and through export of education. At the institutional level, foreign students would represent, above all, a stable source of income. However, all those goals will be very hard to achieve for many reasons.

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### Challenges

The most important challenge involves quality assurance and degree recognition. In fact, Russian degrees are not recognized in the developed world or in a number of developing countries—such as India, which refused to acknowledge Russian diplomas in 2002. That is why studying in Russia does not make sense for many potential students. Nevertheless, joining the Bologna process, which occurred in 2003, should foster the convertibility of Russian degrees and strengthen the position of Russia in the international educational market.

Another barrier to increasing the number of foreign students in Russia is language. The Russian language lost the status won for it by the Soviet Union, making education in Russia inaccessible for foreigners. But even after learning Russian in their home countries or in preliminary language courses in Russia, many foreign students enrolled in Russian higher education institutions lack the necessary proficiency in the

language to take full advantage of their studies. To resolve the language problem, some universities are starting pilot programs that offer courses in certain foreign languages—English, French, and German.

Other issues include the absence of information on education in Russia for perspective students, the inability of most Russian universities to compete on the international market, and the lack of marketing skills. Surveys have shown that most foreign students come to Russia on the recommendation of family members or friends, or are sent by their governments.

One of the perils facing international education is the avid desire of some institutions to earn money by enrolling tuition-paying students (most Russians are able to study for free). International students have thus become one of the vital sources of revenue. Some universities are ready to overlook everything in order to get a student who pays money. They wink at a student's educational qualifications, achievements, and progress while studying. This approach influences the general level of the student body of an institution and the quality of education.

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In addition, conditions on campus—housing and the overall level of services—particularly in some regions, cannot be seen as an asset of Russian higher education. Furthermore, the personal safety of international students, especially those from Africa and Asia, is a serious issue in many Russian cities.

These problems raise concerns about the policy of attracting international students to Russian universities. Undoubtedly, the major famous institutions are able to compete and attract good students who are eager to study and complete their degrees. But there are students who enroll at other Russian universities and do anything but study. A number of reports have appeared in the press about international students, mostly from developing countries, who are involved in illegal business activities or narcotics distribution. In the absence of work permits or adequate support from their governments, families, or sponsors, international students have to earn a living by all means possible.

In conclusion, today Russia is outdone by many countries in the number of international students in its

higher education system. Also lacking in Russia is the understanding that a policy of attracting foreigners will require much effort, financial resources, and time. In Russia, the current situation with regard to international students and future prospects has not been examined well enough and will require serious research. ■

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## International Higher Education in Russia: Missing Data

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Throughout its history, the Soviet Union was widely considered to be a “closed society.” Examples of the country's profile include restrictions on foreign travel, a lack of transparency, and keeping the outside world ignorant about conditions within the country. A common thread was the lack of publicly available data or the provision of false data on a variety of topics. Perestroika put an end to that isolation and opened doors to the global integration of the former Soviet nations. However, some of the old Soviet habits die hard. Anyone involved in research on higher education in Russia knows it is very difficult to obtain accurate statistics on the subject. The database on foreign student mobility continues to be restricted and problematical, which makes it impossible to assess internationalization of Russian higher education.

### *The Current Situation*

The former Soviet leadership proudly proclaimed the USSR to be a world leader in higher education, providing impressive statistics on the numbers of foreign students studying in the country. Fact sheets from Soviet times claim that “all the advantages and high quality of Soviet education attracted in 1989 over 130,000 foreign students from more than 160 countries.” At the same time, specific information concerning this topic was considered classified and thus kept in the “restricted section” of the Federal State Archive. Even today, the data have yet to be released.

Given the right to engage in international cooperation on the institutional level by the 1992 Federal Education Act, Russian universities initiated a nationwide movement to attract foreign students. For the last decade, data collection concerning international students has occurred at the institutional level and been submitted to the Ministry of Education. It would be reasonable to