



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Escape from Freedom. The Russian Academic Community and the Problem of Academic Rights and Freedoms.

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ABSTRACT

To what extent does science in authoritarian societies initiate practices of democracy and freedom? This article provides an overview of the issue of academic rights and freedoms as an integral part of the academic ethos in the USSR and the Russian Federation and concludes that there has been a paradoxical shift in the relative extent of rights and freedoms in wider society vs. the academic world. In this author's opinion, academic proto-freedom existed in the USSR as a component of the privileged position held by a segment of the academic community and that, therefore, the latter experienced a degree of freedom that was greater than that afforded by Soviet society in general. The situation evened out in the late 80's and early 90's and finally, with the attack of authoritarianism against the remaining academic autonomy of Russian universities in the 2000s, resulted in fewer freedoms within academia compared to society as a whole.

KEYWORDS: Russia; Academic Rights and Freedoms; USSR; History; Human Rights

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There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom", the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Richard Shaull

1. Academic rights and freedoms: debates over concept

The concept of academic freedom is very controversial at its core. Indeed, how did the principles invented to protect the autonomy of the university as a medieval corporation become the fundamental ideas of current research and science? As Conrad Russell put it, "...from the very beginning of the history of Universities in the West, the claim to free intellectual inquiry and to control over their own teaching and degrees has been identified with the claim to the privileges and a self-governing corporation to run its own affairs (Russell 1993, p. 15).

In fact, the definition of academic freedom has expanded over time. Since the Middle Ages the term itself has covered professors' freedom to teach in their areas of expertise without external control, and students' freedom to learn what they wanted without limitation. Later the Humboldtian university, which emerged in 19th-Century Germany, reformulated these ideals in the form of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit* and included research as another component of academic freedom. As one scholar aptly put it: "Academics claimed special rights because of their pursuit of truth, and expected secular and ecclesiastical authorities to grant universities autonomy." (Altbach 2007, p. 150)

In the United States, the interrelation between academic rights and university autonomy was evident in the limits of scholars' rights. Freedom of expression—the core freedom of Academia—existed solely within the campus, and only in teaching and research. Also, although both the State and the Church have always presented threats to academic freedom, political regimes posed a particularly real threat to university autonomy. Even the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a pioneering organization in the field of the protection of academic rights founded in 1915, was unable to shield university professors during the McCarthy

era (O’Neil 2008, p. 23). Legal scholar William P. Murphy described academic rights in the United States as an “emerging constitutional right” as late as 1963. (Murphy 1963). It was only in the mid-seventies that academic freedoms came to be viewed as part and parcel of civil rights, thanks to several decisions of the US Supreme Court (O’Neil 2008, p. 59-60).

In general, academic rights in the US are based on three pillars (Fuchs 1963, p.431):

1. Philosophy of intellectual freedom,
2. Idea of the autonomy of scholarly communities
3. The freedoms guaranteed in the Bill of Rights.

The US definition is rather focused on the First Amendment and, therefore, comprises a scholar’s right to speak freely not only inside, but outside of Academia as well. The Humboldtian version of academic freedom in Europe is rather concentrated on university autonomy and on *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*. The main disagreement, therefore, between the American and European traditions of the concept of academic rights is the struggle between the autonomy of the university and freedom from state control (in the US) and the idea of the political neutrality of the university (in Europe) (Altbach 2007, p. 52-53).

This discrepancy is especially salient in the case of an authoritarian country such as Russia where, on the one hand, the state has always controlled the university and, on the other hand, politics in the form of Communist ideology used to be an inseparable part of any scientific discipline - even humanities, social and natural sciences. The history of the Soviet Union raises the question of whether academic freedom in any form is possible in an authoritarian country, or whether we can speak of academic freedom in such conditions at all (Kuraev 2015, p.182).

2. Academic Science and Academic Rights in the USSR

There is a paucity of research on academic freedom in Russia in recent years because, as Research Scholar Anna Smolentseva of the Moscow High School of

Economics put it, “maybe academics just don’t know how to make use of such freedom after having lived all their lives without it” (Smolentseva 2003, p. 417). Indeed, while the topic of Intellectuals and Soviet Power enjoys a popularity among scholars (see, for example, Shlapentokh 2014, Shalin 2012), there is only one publication—devoted to dissent within Academia—that addresses the question of academic freedom (Bezborodov 1998). Nevertheless, the publications of Anna Smolentseva (2003, 2017a, 2017b), Alex Kuraev (2015), and Philipp Altbach’s sociological surveys of academic professions in the world (1995, 2001, 2007), give us an overview of the situation pertaining to academic rights in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The history of science in the USSR is undeniably important for understanding the contemporary social and political processes in Russia, particularly given the continuing centrality of science for Russia’s public opinion. The existence of a special academic ethos in a totalitarian country as well as the issue of academic rights and freedoms, or a wider in scope “intellectual freedom” as A.D. Sakharov called it, constitute an integral part of this story.

The peculiarities of perceiving academic rights and freedoms in Russia seem to be directly related, on one hand, to the logic of the transforming authoritarian regime in the USSR and modern Russia and, on the other hand, to the history of an emergence and development of the dissident movement in the USSR.

A. Kuraev in his overview carefully outlined an argument regarding the core difference between the Western paradigm of a University and Soviet higher education and listed three issues for analysis – uniformity, top-down administration, and undivided authority as an organizational principle (Kuraev 2015, p. 182). There was no such thing as political neutrality for such an authoritarian creation. Permanent “class struggle” and “suppressing dissent” were key factors underlying student admissions and faculty hiring practices (Kurochkin 2011). Such a picture, at a glance, makes any discussion of academic rights impossible - the Soviet system avoided “even considering the issue of individual rights or academic freedoms in higher education” (Kuraev 2015, 185).

A short period of relative academic freedom following the 1917 revolution, which should more appropriately be viewed as academic diversity with an obvious ideological bias, was in the 1930s already replaced by rigid Party and State control (for an analytical review of the history of science in the USSR see Graham, 1993). Nevertheless, this control exhibited certain differences in rigidity and scope - for example, in natural sciences it was somewhat of a formality, since these disciplines contained no ideological component,¹ unlike the highly ideologized humanities, which to some extent turned into ramified ideological narratives rather than scientific disciplines. In addition, a certain degree of autonomy, granted by the Party and the State agencies to researchers in such fields as nuclear energy, gave them, despite strict control, an unexpectedly high degree of research freedom, especially in comparison with their colleagues in the humanities. Nevertheless, natural sciences research has also been highly bureaucratized and, in this sense, also remained under the Party's and State's control. Thus, moving up the career ladder, as well as attending a graduate school, had to be sanctioned by Party agencies (Josephson 1992, 600). Party control created a dual-power situation in any and all Soviet academic institutions - the head of an institution's Communist party office was equal to its Rector (or to a Director in case of an academic institute) and often issued important institutional resolutions jointly. (Chufarov 1989).

After Stalin's death in 1953, the situation underwent significant changes, primarily due to active reassessment of Party documents (Khrushchev's 1956 speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party during which he condemned the brutality of Stalin's regime), as well as the well-established practice of analyzing literary works. First of all, the level of Party control was slightly decreased to allow for the "correction of the Party agenda," in a very restrictive way, of course. Nevertheless, a number of scholars interpreted it as an invitation to seriously revisit the situation within Academia and, in particular, the issue of academic freedom and autonomy.

¹ Lysenkoism was an exception, see (Graham 2016)

For example, in the Heat Engineering Laboratory of the Academy of Sciences, during the discussion of Khrushchev's report regarding the personality cult of Stalin, young physicist Yuri Orlov, later a well-known dissident, addressed the gathering with harsh criticism, while a discussion of Sergei Dudintsev's novel *Ne Khlebom Edinym* [Not by Bread Alone] in the Central Writers House on October 22, 1956 essentially turned into a “rally against the domination of bureaucrats limiting the freedom of scientific creativity.” (Shubin 2008) The subject of scientists’ freedom from bureaucratic domination transformed quite easily into an active protest against censorship and oppressive State and Party control, which had an impact on the effectiveness of scientific progress.

Nevertheless, after Brezhnev’s return, any active debates about political repression during Stalin’s time were discontinued and the country entered a period of creeping re-Stalinization that, according to historians of the human rights movement, particularly affected the academic community, historians, archivists, and, of course, writers (Abramovich 2004, p. 276). This very milieu became the center of the human rights movement in the USSR, and, for this reason, the demands for openness, freedom of speech and creativity became the driving force for the relatively small Soviet dissident community, many of whom came from the academic environment (Alekseeva 1992). In addition to above-mentioned Y. Orlov, their ranks, of course, included outstanding physicist A. D. Sakharov, physicists N. Shcharansky, V. Chalidze, and A. Tverdokhlebov, biologist S. A. Kovalev, chemist Y. Kukk, mathematician Y. Shafarevich and many others. A. S. Yesenin-Volpin, the very creator of the Soviet human rights concept, was a mathematician. It is obvious that this predominance of natural scientists was somehow connected with the peculiarities of Soviet science and its functioning.

Notably, the mid-sixties witnessed the beginning of an active discussion of ethical problems in science, but it focused primarily on the responsibility of a scientist, on research ethics rather than on rights and freedoms within the Academy per

se.² The position of A.D. Sakharov was, of course, an exception; in his work *Razmysblenie o Mire, Progresse i Intellektual'noi Svobode* [Reflection on Peace, Progress and Intellectual Freedom] he directly named “intellectual freedom” - or, more precisely, its suppression and restriction, as a global challenge to peace and progress (Sakharov 1968). Sakharov’s friend and companion Sergey Kovalev succinctly formulated the key ethical principles he viewed as fundamental to science: “The two main requirements science presents to a person are, first, intellectual honesty and, next, intellectual fearlessness” (Daniel 2015).

It must be said that honesty and fearlessness, often enough, had a sad ending for scientists. Although, starting with Khrushchev, the regime no longer practiced mass repression, even such distinguished scientists as A. Sakharov paid for their human rights activities with imprisonment, exile, a ban on practicing their profession, or a stay in a psychiatric hospital. As mentioned above, many scientists joined the human rights movement and shared in its unfortunate fate. Despite all this, the majority of Soviet scientists, especially during the relatively economically stable years of the “stagnation” era, developed an ethos of behavior that presupposed no resistance against the State; rather, it was characterized by escapism and skepticism, sometimes interspersed with indignation expressed privately at home, which was generally typical for Soviet citizens. It can be said that a certain general autonomy continued to exist, however. As for example in the USSR’s Academy of Sciences, which maintained a degree of independence,³ and that some institutions, especially those located far from the capital, served as a sort of haven for dissidents, even in the humanities.⁴

It should be noted, however, that a number of academic practices did continue to exhibit elements of pluralism and democratic competition - for example, electing directors of academic institutions or the defense of research and disserta-

² The first article on the subject of scientific ethics appeared in 1966. More in M. G. Lazar, 2010, 63-77.

³ For example, despite serious pressure by the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, it refused to expel A.D. Sakharov from the Academy.

⁴ The so-called *Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School*, which formed around Tartu University professor Juri Lotman is a well-known example.

tional work. These procedures represented a kind of proto-democratic practices that should more appropriately be viewed as a particular kind of privilege related to autonomy and granted by the State in order to achieve certain technological goals. In this sense, it can be said that some autonomy and certain academic freedoms were not freedoms as such, but reflected a special privileged position, a kind of academic privilege (Muller 2017, p. 59). In the peculiar conditions of a totalitarian society and a non-market economy, such academic privilege had a mostly symbolic meaning, but retained a sufficient degree of importance for society. This explains why a large number of people in Soviet society were amenable to going through their university studies, graduate school, and dissertation defense only to have a salary that was sometimes two or three times smaller than that of a factory worker. The academic elite - those who held high positions in academic institutions, were the exception. However, the staff of academic organizations in the Soviet period comprised 7 to 10 percent of the total number of scientists (Kneen 1984, p. 13, tab. 2.2). Thus, research and teaching work was generally rather low-paid in comparison with other activities, especially blue-collar jobs. People were motivated by the symbolic high position of a scientist or a teacher in the science-oriented Soviet society.

The insignificant role of trade unions and their servility to the State presented another special problem within Soviet academic science (and, of course, elsewhere as well). In fact, Soviet academic trade unions, like all the other Soviet trade unions, served as vehicles for Party and State control over Soviet science. And yet, despite being closely controlled by the Party and the State, scientists actively participated in solidarity campaigns with other colleagues, protesting, among other things, against the placement of A. S. Yesenin-Volpin into a psychiatric ward, which prompted the writing of the famous “Letter of the Ninety-Nine” (Fuchs, 2007, 221). The political events of the sixties and the processes they put into motion gave rise to spirited discussions in a number of places within academia. The story of the “Letter of the Forty Six” is telling in this respect.

‘Military-academic hubs’, mostly located outside the European part of the country, in Siberia, were established as special “ghettos” for academic freedom and

shelters for the Russian intellectual opposition. The physical distance from the Kremlin sometimes created the “side effect” in local academic communities of lessened State and Party control (Galich 1991). On February 19, 1968, a group of researchers from the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and professors of the Novosibirsk State University signed a letter of protest against the closed trial of Alexander Ginzburg, Yuri Galanskov, Alexei Dobrovolsky and Vera Lashkova, known as the “Letter of the Forty Six.” The letter was sent to the Supreme Court of the RSFSR and to the USSR Prosecutor General, on March 23, 1968; its content was reported by American newspapers, and its text was broadcast by the Voice of America radio station on March 27. At the same time, a group of NSU students painted the Novosibirsk Akademgorodok buildings with “anti-Soviet” slogans. The social profiles of the letter’s signatories were also telling. According to Andrei Amalrik, their total number was 738 and 45% of them were people of science-related professions. Among the 46 signatories from the National Science Center, 35 worked in the Akademgorodok scientific research institutes (including four Doctors of Science and ten Candidates of Science; nineteen were the Novosibirsk State University professors, three worked in the Physics and Mathematics Specialized Secondary School. Six signatories were the CPSU members (Vodichev & Kupersthokh 2001, p. 49). The de-facto predominance of “academic” employees among the signatories demonstrates a fairly high degree of liberalism precisely in these elite (from the Soviet scientific hierarchy point of view) institutions. However, here we face yet another important question pertaining to academic rights and freedoms - the extent to which this position was specifically characteristic of the elite.

As previously indicated, a peculiar feature of the human rights movement in the USSR was the fact that its principal participants were scientists, teachers and writers (in other words, primarily the intelligentsia) and that the issue of socio-economic rights was virtually not broached. Even when the Human Rights Committee for scientific study of human rights issues in the USSR was created and, for a short time, remained in existence, this issue was not included in its priorities (see Klein 2004, p. 4-7). In this regard it is indicative that even in the aforementioned

unique Novosibirsk Akademgorodok social stratification between elite and “ordinary” scientists, expressed in particular in housing options, was a serious problem. In other words, the general idea of scientific freedom and the overall desire to eliminate barriers was not associated with the problem of social inequality and socio-economic rights in general.

Of course, the academic environment produced other intellectual resistance practices, not always, in fact, liberal-democratic. For example, the All-Russian Social-Christian Union for the Liberation of the People, led by Ogurtsov (Konohova 2014, p. 65) was established in Leningrad University and continued to function for some time. Home-based seminars, as a special form of resistance to state censorship and control, became a special practice of intellectual resistance against lack of freedom. Most of these seminars, apparently, were philosophical or religious-philosophical in character, and are even understood now as a form of survival of such disciplines as philosophy in the conditions of suffocating ideological pressure (see, for example, Kuznetsova 2016, pp. 80-81).

Another noteworthy reaction of the academic community to the ideological pressure and firing of employees was the creation of the Jewish People's University (Tulevich 2005), which catered to students either expelled for filing an application to leave the USSR or simply failed on their entrance exams due to the all but officially sanctioned anti-Semitism of admission commissions, which used special set of examination assignments⁵ for Jewish applicants (Kanevsky & Senderov 2005).⁶ It should be noted that the mechanism of this discriminatory “intellectual genocide,” as termed by Tulevich, was highly peculiar. Apparently, there were no direct written instructions to weed out the Jewish applicants. Moreover, there were cases when, for example, a Jewish applicant was the winner of the USSR-wide Academic Olym-

⁵ A special "Jewish Test Book" was compiled for this purpose. It is known that when indignant parents gave an example of such an assignment to A.D. Sakharov, he was able to resolve it, but it took his entire day.

⁶ It should be noted that many who participated in these processes not only often continue to be employed in these Russian universities, but, sometimes, even head these institutions; In particular, V. Sadovnichy, a member of the Moscow State University's commission, currently serves as the Rector of the Moscow State University.

pics; in this case, despite all sorts of obstacles, such applicants still had to be—and indeed were—admitted.

The fate of homosexuals or people suspected of homosexuality was no less disheartening. The most famous episode in this respect was the tragic story of Professor Lev Klein, arrested in March 1981 on suspicion of “homosexuality” (a criminal offence in the USSR), who then spent 18 months in prison (Samoilov 1993, p. 7). The significant part of this story is that, after his release from the prison camp, Klein was stripped of his academic degree and title (later, he was unanimously awarded the Doctor of Sciences degree despite not having the Candidate degree); his monograph, then in preparation for publication, had been destroyed. This story clearly demonstrates not only the great vulnerability of homosexuals in the Soviet Academy, but also the amazing servility of some academic institutions in a situation of direct persecution against one of their members.⁷

Thus, at the beginning of perestroika, the situation with academic freedom can be described as follows:

- A certain degree of autonomy, especially for academic institutes, with elements of proto-democratic procedures (in particular, elections of some department heads)

- Overall, the Party and the state exerted greater ideological control over the humanities, while in the natural sciences, especially physics, the control over the scientists as holders of state secrets came primarily from the KGB.

Finally, persecution of dissidents in the academy was rather mild (in comparison with other spheres) and strongly depended not only on the geographical position of a given institution, but also on the personality of its leader.

⁷ It has to be noted that the Soviet Academy of Sciences, nevertheless, refused to take away Sakharov’s title of academician; the legend has it that the Academy responded that the last scholars to do such a thing were the Academy of Sciences of Nazi Germany, which rescinded Einstein’s academician status.

3. Academic Freedom and University Autonomy in the late nineteen-eighties and early nineties

The second half of the eighties was not only a time of breathtaking transformation for the Soviet system, but also the beginning of a serious economic crisis. The Soviet people, including scholars and Academic fellows, faced a shortage of food and basic goods. The call for democracy and perestroika was accompanied serious trouble in the private lives of those affiliated with academia. (Kuraev 2015, p. 189) Perestroika and the ensuing disintegration of the USSR greatly changed the situation in the academic environment. The degree of autonomy of higher educational institutions changed dramatically - they suddenly had significant autonomy, especially by comparison with Soviet times (Bain 2003b, pp. 6-15). The academic environment also put forth a large number of democratic politicians, such as Galina Starovoitova and Anatoly Sobchak. Active participation of Soviet academics in politics was no longer limited to the aforementioned old dissents. The new wave of scholars, inspired by an opportunity to participate in the first Soviet open electoral process, also joined the 'democratic wing' of the first democratically elected Soviet parliament. Galina Starovoitova, for instance, came from academia; she was a fellow of the Leningrad Institute of Anthropology and Ethnology, who had studied the traditional culture in Caucasus and, due to her active participation in local political life, was nominated as a candidate from Armenia and won the election. Anatoly Sobchak was a professor of Economics in St. Petersburg University. Yuri Afanasiev was a historian who criticized Soviet history in late 80s. All of them became the new leaders in the post-communist Parliament (interestingly, Afanasiev later leaving politics and founding the Russian State Humanitarian University). Nevertheless, the general interest toward democracy and human rights in academia seems to have decreased in the second half of the nineties. The reasons were several.

First, during the nineties, Russian education was rocked not only by the deepening economic crisis, but also by non-stop reforms, the majority of which have never been fully implemented. It is important to say that in spite of this, some positive developments were indeed achieved (Guriev 2009; Smolentseva 2003), in-

cluding the significant decentralization of the educational system, the emergence of private education, and a notable de-unification and diversification of the educational content (Smolentseva 2003, p. 396). The next reason is that these reforms and innovations coincided with the crisis in and underinvestment into the system of higher education. Teaching salaries were extremely low, seriously affecting not only the quality of education (Ibid), but also the attitude of academics towards the reforms and towards democracy as well. Finally, although the ideological component quickly disappeared from the universities, the staff which had previously taught Marxism-Leninism, had been quickly reallocated to the fields of Philosophy, Political Science or Journalism. This legacy seriously obstructed the liberal shift in the humanities and social sciences and, from our perspective, predetermined the conservative shift of Russian academia in the beginning of the 2000s.

At the same time, the economic crisis of the 90s dealt a heavy blow to academic privileges and to the general situation of scientists and academic instructors. Academic science lost a large share of its funding and, at the same time, the symbolic capital of belonging to the intellectual elite also diminished, while the limited degree of intra-university freedom ceased to be regarded as a special privilege. Nevertheless, it is possible to agree with the conclusion that “The educational system became more open, flexible, democratic, mobile, and oriented toward the needs of the society and the market economy” (Smolentseva 2003, p. 400).

Having chosen a democratic path of development, the Russian Federation joined the Bologna Process in 2003, and the universities began to sign the Magna Charta Universitatum.⁸ Participation in the Bologna process, the rapid development of many new areas in the humanities (human rights, gender studies), emergence of new educational institutions, often as a result of international support and cooperation (such as the European University in St. Petersburg, Smolny College of Liberal

⁸ To date, sixteen Russian universities, including the Russian State University for the Humanities, the Moscow State University and the St. Petersburg State University, have signed this declaration. See the complete list at Magna Charta Universitatum <http://www.magna-charta.org/signatory-universities>

Arts and Sciences, the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, the Higher School of Economics, and others), all these developments promised a major breakthrough for Russian science.

One of the few achievements of the young Russian democracy under Yeltsin was this very freedom of speech and expression, which, however, was quite quickly brought to an end. It is significant that, despite the absence of ideological and Party control, during this time period no serious actions were undertaken in the area of building independent trade unions or developing an institute of academic tenure. It is important to mention that, at that time, there was no political repression against members of the academia, ideological restrictions were quite rare (Smolentseva 2003, p. 417). Freedom of speech on campus was part of the freedom of the speech in the country, with all of the controversies entailed therein.

The story of Igor Froyanov provides a good example of its controversial nature. As the Head of the Department of History in the St Petersburg State University, he fired an assistant professor for “relations with European University, because EUSP is financed from abroad, promotes foreign values, and it is really dangerous to the History Department” (Voltskaya, 2000). The active public campaign against Froyanov was successful – he was dismissed from his position, but the question of whether his dismissal was in line with the principles of freedom of speech in general and academic freedom in particular remained unanswered.

The only research of academic rights in the nineties, conducted under the umbrella of the world survey of academic professions, yielded very interesting results.

In an apparent exception from general trends, Russian scholars do not believe that academic freedom is fully protected in Russia. Only 16 percent of the responders gave an affirmative response to the question “Is academic freedom strongly protected in your country?” (Altbach & Lewis 1995, p. 56, table 10).

Despite the official elimination of censorship, the majority of Russian academia gave a negative answer to the question of whether they are free to determine the content of the courses they teach and research they would like to do. (Ibid) In

summarizing the situation during the nineties, one might say that despite the tectonic changes in political and economic life, academia ended up underinvested in, seriously disappointed in the results of political transformation, affected by economic crises and, as we can see from Philipp Altbach's research, skeptical about the level of academic freedom in the country.

At the same time, as pointed out by Guriev in his assessment, the legal status of academia remained vague. Most academic institutions continued to be state-owned and fully funded from the state budget. Nevertheless, they were granted a substantial level of autonomy, and could sometimes resist government pressure. For example, academia preserved some important tools of independence such as secret ballot procedures to elect new Academicians, and was able to protect its intellectual independence in a number of cases (Guriev 2009, p. 713). However, the crucial aspect of this situation was the fact that the academic community did nothing to legally protect itself against state interference and did nothing to implement the principles of *Magna Charta Universitatum* in everyday university life. The full consequences of this lack of initiative became evident in the changing political climate by the end of the first presidential term of V. V. Putin.

4. Problems and Challenges for Academic Rights and Freedoms in Russia (2000 - present)

The legacy of Soviet higher education is very important even 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. A. Kuraev's diagnosis is quite right: "Sovietism in Russian academia dies hard" (Kuraev 2015, p. 190).

One of the reasons for its persistence is the changing policy of the Putin administration, especially starting with Putin's second presidential term. Since that time, the space for academic freedom that was beginning to form in the 90s began to shrink rapidly. This development was prompted by the change in the political climate and the overall curtailing of freedoms in Russia. It can be said that, especially when compared to the USSR, this shrinking freedom has specifically affected science and education to a greater degree than it did society as a whole. This peculiari-

ty can be explained as follows: at some point in the nineties academic freedom ceased to be a privilege that distinguished the Soviet scientist from a Soviet worker, and was simply folded into the general societal freedom. Once there came a certain rejection of political freedom by society overall, combined with drastically increased state control over science and education, the humanities in particular once again became the target of ideological control and dictatorship.

This change is related primarily to the increased role of the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP), especially its constant attempts to increase the level of “spirituality” in education with the help of the “Orthodox culture” - a term most often used as a stand-in for what is, in fact, religious education (Shnirelman 2012). This trend has recently culminated in the addition of theology departments to secular Russian universities, which, of course, feature no theology other than Orthodox Christian. This development was accompanied by the newly formulated ROC MP ideology of human rights, which of course has no place for LGBT rights, issues of euthanasia and other internationally recognized rights that are “unnatural” for the ROC MP human rights doctrine. It must be said, that these developments affect the educational programs, bringing a number of humanitarian disciplines under attack. As a result, we see newly formed departments, such as the Department of Theology at the Moscow Engineering and Physics Institute (MEPhI), or the Department of Orthodox Pedagogy of the Moscow State Medical University, or emergence of such exotic disciplines as “Orthodox sociology.” (Dobren'kov 2012).

In connection with establishing a conservative-protective ideology, entire higher educational disciplines are beginning to mutate or even disappear as “irrelevant” to the unique Russian civilization. Thus, the subject of human rights has almost disappeared from the curricula (Obrazovanie 2015); research in the realm of queer theory has been banished. In many universities the place of religious anthropology has become occupied by aggressive anti-cult movement, which directly addresses its programs to Orthodox anti-cult activists. An overview of the situation with queer studies in Russian Universities was conducted recently (Kondakov

2016). An important point from this survey is as follows – currently the “globalized” part of Russian Academia still dares to teach queer theory, but in a rather Aesopian way (for example, under a neutral title, such as “Sociology of the Family”), but open communication with LGBT organizations or public comments on this topic could result in the loss of university affiliation (Kondakov 2016, p. 113).

A separate place among the challenges to academic freedom is occupied by the policy of the modern Russian state as pertains to the study of history, which has replaced “the memory of the victims by the memory of the executioners” (Khapaeva 2016). This phenomenon has a direct impact on history as an academic discipline and on specific historians. Although an attempt to create a commission to “counteract the falsification of history” (Linan 2010, pp. 169-170) was unsuccessful, the message from the authorities to academia was heard. Since then, for example, attempts, to research the Russian Liberation Army of Gen. Vlasov were met with accusations of extremism and lack of patriotism (Holdsworth 2016), and, at some point undesirable research also came to mean a possibility of criminal prosecution under the “Rehabilitation of Nazism” article of the Criminal Code (Kurilla 2014). Such treatment has already led to situations such as the official Military Historical Society (which is actively supported and funded by the Russian state) standing in opposition to the Free Historical Society. The opposition to the new round of re-Stalinization includes other public initiatives in which academic historians play an important role, particularly the Last Address initiative, in which volunteers create and affix memorial plaques with the names and dates of the “last address” for victims of Stalin’s purges on the buildings the victims lived in. It is significant that such a completely private initiative is extremely popular and directly opposes the official policy of a managed “positive” historical memory.

The second problem, directly related to academic freedom, is the violation of the principle of university autonomy. The educational reform that began in Russia led, among other things, to the emergence of federal universities, in which, by law, the candidate for the position of rector must be presented by the advisory board and then, after an election, must be appointed by the Ministry of Education.

De-facto, keeping in mind that the advisory board mostly consists of state officials, the current system provides no opportunity for any “non state-approved” candidate to be selected for election. In some universities, Rectors are not even elected but appointed by the president (Moscow and St. Petersburg State Universities). According to the official explanation, this was done to ensure responsibility for the serious investment into these Universities. This same practice has been extended to many other universities under the pretext of controlling state budget funds. Next, the appointed rectors try to minimize the degree of influence and resources of the academic councils, reducing their influence to a minimum and, instead of traditional faculties (departments), establish institutes the heads of which are appointed rather than elected. As mentioned above, electing deans and rectors was one of the few democratic practices in the Soviet university, which, despite tight control, created certain opportunities for changing policies within the university. In a sense, we can say that the logic of reformatting university management has been very similar to the logic of Putin's political reforms. If we compare faculties to republics and the university as a whole to a federation, then it can be safely asserted that such a reform has eliminated federalism within the university, introducing instead an actual autocracy, restrained to some extent by the academic council, often with exclusively “advisory functions.” The St. Petersburg State University is an example of such a university.

At the same time, we see an ongoing “optimization” of the staff and, in general, a kind of corporatization of university life. Of course, this is a global phenomenon, which affects Russia along with other countries (Smolentseva 2003), but in Russia the advent of corporate ethics and neo-liberal reforms in the university was met with weakness of university independent trade unions (in fact, the country has only one independent university trade union, University Solidarity) and an extremely weak understanding of the form and possibilities of faculty and student resistance to the economic pressure from state and university management. Among the economic problems of the university, the leader of University Solidarity names an increased workload as well as an increase in the number of students and in class-

room hours. At the same time, the increased workload is accompanied by a reduction in the wages of the teaching faculty, while the salaries of the rectors, on the contrary, continue to grow. Finally, the introduction of the so-called “effective contract” results in situations such as instructors having to assume responsibility for receiving and managing external grants (difficult to plan in the conditions of overall reduction in science funding), producing an incredible amount of scientific work in combination with an increased everyday workload - all of this, more often than not, leads to a tragic decline in the quality of education, or in the depth and significance of publications, but apparently, this is not the main criterion by which the bureaucratic system evaluates education and science (Kudukin 2016).

Significantly, increased state control over universities under the slogans of scientific and higher educational reform has, in fact, revived the Soviet practice of pathological control over all contacts with foreigners. The order “On Export Control”, signed back in 1999 (About Export Control 1999), while pertaining, in general, to control over the export of nuclear weapons, military technology and so on, has nevertheless activated the work of the so-called “First departments” (in charge of ensuring secrecy) and generally invigorated the sphere of excessive control. This increased activity was invariably reflected in a number of so-called “espionage” cases against staff and researchers who had no access to classified information but who were nevertheless accused of divulging military secrets. Thus, Igor Sutyagin, a researcher at the Institute of the USA and Canada, and Valentin Danilov, a physicist from Krasnoyarsk, were accused of divulging military secrets (Solomon, 2005, 336). Since that time, espionage cases have been cropping up all the time, and the fact that in most cases the accused either had no access to state secrets or, as in the case of prof. Baltic State Technical University (St. Petersburg) Afanasiev and Bobyshev (Matt Congdon, 2012, viii), were charged for crimes without evidence.

Independent scientific and professional organizations have been particularly affected by the introduction of the so-called Foreign Agent Law. The famous Levada Center, which had been practically the only independent center for the study of public opinion, became the most prominent “Foreign Agent”. It should be

obvious by now that the direct exclusion from the “foreign agency” law for organizations engaged in scientific research, as provided by the law itself, simply does not exist as far as the the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation is concerned. The latter interprets any public statement on the policy of Russia as political, and foreign funding that allows for the preservation of certain independence from this very policy it sees as a hostile bias. The Levada Center is not the first scientific organization on the foreign agents list - it has merely joined the Center for the Study of Social Policy and Gender Studies (Saratov), the Center for Independent Social Research (St. Petersburg), the Institute for Economic Analysis, the Panorama Center, The Russian Research Center for Human Rights, the St. Petersburg Memorial, SOVA Center for Information and Analysis and other independent research organizations.

There seems to be a separate track in the punitive policy of the modern Russian government aimed at the complete disappearance of research centers and organizations that retain a high degree of independence and academic freedom, as opposed to centers that are highly susceptible to state pressure and censorship. The current near-shutdown of the European University at St. Petersburg is very telling. (Dubrovskiy 2017) This is the second attack against the independent non-state University, organized by A. Sobchak in St. Petersburg. “Russia,” admitted S. Guriev, “has become more suspicious of foreign influence...given the inefficient and rigid bureaucracy, deregulation of education is not very likely.” (Guriev 2009, p. 718) Unfortunately, this prognosis appears to be accurate. In fact, the EUSP already had the experience of being shut down in 2008 due to “fire safety violations”, while the obvious reason for its closing had been the state's response to a grant, given to one of the EUSP professors by the European Union for studying electoral behavior in Russia. At that time, the crisis was successfully resolved once the EUSP declined the grant (Volkov 2012, pp. 99-102).

It is indicative that, in addition to the active resistance of the students, international support made a great deal of difference, evidently due to the fact that at that time Russia still felt the need to explain its position and hoped for some under-

standing outside the country. The situation, apparently, changed dramatically after the annexation of Crimea. Currently, the European University loses one court case after another and, apparently, is preparing not only to surrender its state license, hoping to return it later, but also to leave the building – the one, in which the university was born and grew into a recognized leader in Russian education. Notably, the attack against the university was initiated by notorious Duma Deputy Milonov, the author and the moving force behind the law on “LGBT propaganda”, who accused the University of financial fraud and of engaging in “fake sciences”, such as gender studies. (Weir 2017) It is also significant that, unlike in 2008, the university’s management has so far refrained from direct appeal to the international community; evidently feeling skeptical about its chances of positively influencing the situation. A journalist from the Christian Science Monitor cites the words of political scientist Nikolai Petrov who notes that, paradoxically, starting from the era of Peter the Great, Russia has constantly tried to use Europe as a source of technology, but avoided borrowing political ideas in every possible way (Weir 2017).

Finally, the recent general civil protests of March 26 and June 12 have seriously affected the situation regarding the rights of students. High school and university students constituted the majority of the protesters, and currently find themselves under pressure in the form of all sorts of threats from the university administration and public statements about the impermissibility of “extremist actions” (that is, actions of civil protest). In some cities, examinations were scheduled on Sunday to prevent the participation of young people in the protest (Russia protest 2017). Post-Soviet Russia, has easily incorporated the neoliberal reform agenda while neglecting the social and humanistic aspects of higher education (Smolentseva 2017a, p. 13). We can add here “including academic rights and freedoms”, which were sacrificed, on one hand, to the neo-corporate nature of the current Russian state, and, on the other hand, to its authoritarian tendencies. It can be said that Russia implemented the worst case scenario, combining its neoliberal reforms with a very aggressive foreign policy and with creating the image of an internal enemy. The latest scandal with the Doctoral Dissertation of Vladimir Medinsky - the minister of

culture of the Russian Federation - is quite remarkable in this regard – instead of evaluating the quality of his doctoral paper, most of his protectors preferred to juggle arguments built on conspiracy theories and “protection of patriotic values against Western aggression” (Balmforth 2017).

5. Conclusion

Increasing authoritarian tendencies, especially noticeable after the annexation of the Crimea, have put the academic community in Russia in a difficult situation. All protests, both political and civil, can result in job loss or even criminal prosecution, made easier by the new amendments to the law on rallies, marches and demonstrations. Moreover, the general financial crisis, the fear of losing one’s job and the weakness of the trade union movement all make any serious resistance against direct violations of academic autonomy, or regular violations of academic rights and freedoms, almost impossible. Although corporatist logic now threatens the US and European universities generally, it seems that in Russia this is compounded by authoritarian power being transferred directly to the campus due to loss of autonomy and by the weakness of civil society and the professional community. Thus, the resulting picture is rather strange; in the USSR the academic community had relatively more freedom than society as a whole, then, during perestroika and the beginning of the 1990s, the conditions with respect to freedom were more or less the same throughout society and academia, and, finally, the neoliberal reforms of the 2000s and growing authoritarianism in the Academy led to greater limits on the actual freedom of teachers and students as compared to the society as a whole. Apparently, this development partially explains the promising picture of student protest mobilization in modern Russia, giving some hope for changing the situation with relation to democracy in general and academic rights and freedoms in the Russian Academy, in particular. Special attention should also be paid to the impact of the Soviet legacy on academic rights and freedoms in the post-Soviet space, where comparative research is also very much needed in order to find a way to improve the situation based on a real assessment of the current state of affairs.

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