

From the Editorial Board. In the previous issue of the journal we published a number of materials regarding the draft federal law on the reorganization of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Related problems have been set out clearly in the published “Open letter to the President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin by Academician Zh.I. Alferov”. As is known, in the course of further elaboration of the draft law it was possible to reach a compromise on a number of pressing issues. In September, the law was passed by the chambers of the Federal Assembly and signed by the President of the Russian Federation. The law establishes the Federal Agency of Scientific Organizations (FANO), which should become the structure that manages the property of the Academy of Sciences. A working group has been formed to work out the regulations of the Agency; the group includes representatives of RAS, the State Duma, the Council of Federation and the Ministry of Education and Science. Draft regulations have been submitted for public discussion. Conceptual aspects of organizing the activity of the reorganized Russian Academy of Sciences require careful consideration of the views expressed at the discussions. An article by the Deputy Director of the Institute of System Analysis, Doctor of Economics, Professor A.N. Shvetsov “Russian Academy of Sciences – another target of devastating reforms”, published in the Russian economic journal, Issue No.4, 2013 can be distinguished among them, as it provides well-grounded argumentation and sound reasoning. Despite the fact that the proposals were formulated by the author prior to the adoption of the law, a number of them, especially in the final part of the article, are very important in the ongoing activities for the implementation of the law. This part of the article by A.N. Shvetsov is presented below.

Shvetsov A.N.

Russian Academy of Sciences – another target of devastating reforms

4. Controversial federal draft law – a sentence passed on RAS and Russia’s fundamental science.

Concluding the speculations concerning the future of Russia’s academic science, I would like to make direct comment on this draft law (“On the Russian Academy of Sciences, the reorganization of the state academies of sciences and amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation”), adopted by the State Duma in the second reading at the end of the 2013 spring session. It is very likely that it will soon be enacted into law, and all the debates in this regard will, probably, acquire a purely historical interest. It might be, however, that this would not happen, for some reasons, and a decision would be made on a comprehensive revision of the draft law or even there might be

a possibility of adopting a fundamentally different legal act on the issues of RAS reforming. And both cases would require expert assessments and proposals, and therefore, considerations on the essence of the given document, which is more than controversial, might be useful.

The considered version of the draft law, promulgated after its second reading in the Duma, judging by its easily predictable consequences for the present-day RAS, is not different from the initially version submitted to the Federal Parliament. An important thing is that the document, even in its new edition, “works” for the same purpose of the reform, namely, the disintegration of the Academy as a single self-regulatory system by singling out the team of full-fledged members of RAS (who, as

a matter of fact, will work under its guise in the new conditions), separating this new formation from research institutes and depriving it of the responsibility for organization, performance and efficiency of research activities carried out in the current network of academic institutions. All speculations about the “new role” of RAS are just idle talk not backed by anything, for the Academy will not be given the powers and resources to solve even those problems which are stated in the present draft law. The Academy will become an “interest club”, the loyal behaviour of which is provided by significant intervention in its internal affairs.

The merging of the three academies will turn the general meeting into an inefficient, easily managed body at least due to the absence of internal historically established unity between the three components of its participants and because of their connectedness with different superior bodies (Russian Academy of Agricultural Sciences is “supervised” by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Academy of Medical Sciences – by the Ministry of Healthcare, the Academy of Sciences itself – by the Ministry of Education and Science). And RAS itself in its new form will become a structure (probably, departmental rather than governmental) with little authority, which is fully accountable to the executive power. It will lose its nationwide status and the ability to conduct more or less independent expert examinations; its separation from its own institutions will challenge the validity of electing new members and increase the probability of admitting random people by the patronage of officials. All this will also lead to a decrease in the international authority of RAS, and it will cease to be considered as the representative of the Russian science in the international arena.

Adoption of the draft law in the legal sense would mean the elimination of the existing Russian Academy of Sciences; according to the basic logic, the members of the liquidated organization (academicians) should also

disappear. However, the document provides for the convening of a kind of general meeting consisting of no one knows whom and in an unknown quantity; besides, it is not clear how this body will operate, how it is expected to adopt the Charter (which actually should define, who the academicians are and how they should function). This anti-logic and the disregard of legal correctness, apparently indicate not so much the low professionalism of the authors of the draft law, but that the issue of formation of the new Academy, from their point of view, is a secondary one. And the most important for them is the organizational separation of RAS as a subject of management (general meeting, Presidium, apparatus) and research institutes as an object of management.

At that, the fate of the national fundamental research and scientific institutions, where it is conducted, may be even more deplorable than that of the Russian Academy of Sciences itself. This forecast is based on the following two groups of considerations. The considerations of the first kind consist in the fact that sudden changes in the current (reformed) system will lead to failures in the implementation of all functions ensuring the existence of RAS – financing, procurement, maintenance, execution of contract works, conclusion of new contracts, etc. Budget financing will not open until the situation with the status of institutions becomes clear; but even when the status is gained, it will not lead to immediate opening of funding, because it is subject to its own budget-related rules and procedures. It is sad that the authors of the document have not proposed any transitional damping measures in this respect, which are mandatory when carrying out such radical transformations.

Further, the dysfunction will inevitably get worse through the gradation of institutions planned by the legislators, i.e. the organization of inspections, the work of commissions and other activities with the subsequent application of organizational measures.

Judging by the degree of morbidity of their consequences, the institutions subject to the immediate reorganization (liquidation) will be in the most favourable position. The institutions, re-subordinated to other agencies, will have a difficult period of searching for a place in the new structures, and they will also have to address the issues of financing, material and technological support, and to build relations with new higher-level institutions. The remaining institutions will face certification, structural changes, the shaking up of personnel, the increase of tension in labor collectives etc.; this will continue for an indefinitely long period. It is clear that the most active, healthy and important part of the researchers and personnel working with complex technical devices, will try to find other jobs, for in such circumstances, it would not make sense to lose the best years (which are so few in the scientific life), and young people will hardly find any incentives for choosing science as their occupation under the given circumstances.

In this connection it is necessary to point out some easily predictable challenges that are somehow not mentioned when discussing the reform. It primarily concerns the fact that the employees of institutions will lose a highly prestigious status of the associate of the Academy of Sciences. Although this status deteriorated significantly in the post-Soviet period, it still partly compensated for low salaries, and for the conditions of research work lagging behind the international standards, and other negative points; it also left a hope for radical improvements in the organization, which is fundamentally important for the country.

One more fact: the notorious “disposal of the burden of elderly workers” is fraught with the erosion of specific academic culture of communication, the loss of specific relationships and ways of ensuring professional integrity and reputation.

Thus, the adoption of the post-reform scientific system will start “from scratch” – without history, traditions, experience of older generations, which will be synergetically superimposed on the situation of financial, material and organizational confusion.

Such kind of stagnation situations are extremely favourable for adventurers, careerists and other rogues; such situations are often accompanied by arrogance, meanness, lie, treachery, hypocrisy – everything that is absolutely inconsistent with the maintenance of normal research environment. If our society in general still cannot fully recover psychologically after the “turbulent 1990s”, then the especially “sensitive” academic community, which has already suffered greater than others, now has to face the described gloomy prospects. By the way, one should not forget the tragic precedent of Germany: German science, being the world leader in the early 20th century, was not able to regain its leadership after the Nazi interference, despite the outstanding achievements in the country’s political and economic development.

The second group of fears concerning not only the development, but also the very existence of fundamental science in Russia, is connected with the fact that the reformers have presented virtually no evidence that the results of the reform would be positive. Its substantiation is reduced completely to the above mentioned rebuke for the inefficiency of RAS, but nothing has been said about the very reasons why the new system of organization of science will be better than the existing one. One can argue at length whether academicians, in principle, are able to manage scientific property efficiently, but, please, do prove that “a new federal body of the executive power”, the functions and status of which are not stated in the draft law, will manage this property more efficiently. The actual state of affairs in the management of state property in general can be observed for more than 20 years: in fact there are no

examples of its effective involvement in national interests¹. To put it mildly, the doubtfulness of the claim that the “new authority” will use state property more efficiently than the existing RAS, is aggravated in the context of the regulation, which transfers to this authority the “management” of all the institutions (Paragraph 9 of Article 18, Chapter 6 of the draft law), i.e. it assumes the responsibility not only for the effective disposal of property, but for scientific research as well. Here a rhetorical question arises: what resources, primarily intellectual, can the infamous “agency” possess to maintain the efficiency of scientific research at least on the same level?

It is difficult to abandon the assumption that this agency is not going to take part in the organization of scientific research. After the epic division of the institutions into three categories has come to an end, the agency will revise the property of the first two of them and will then withdraw the identified “surplus”. Then the institutions, remaining in the sphere of RAS, will be transferred to universities according to the following specialization: physics – to MFTI, MPhI, MSU and MPEI, chemistry – to MSU and some other, social sciences – to NRU HSE. The Siberian Branch of RAS will become part of NSU, Far-Eastern Branch will join FEFU (the stones of Russky Island are waiting for their intellectual framing!), etc. Although the real consequence of this maneuver will be the disappearance of the historical phenomenon of RAS, it will be possible to show the unprecedented pace of development of University science to the whole world!

Thus, the implementation of the considered draft law would lead to the collapse of Russia’s fundamental science as an integrated state system. At best, it would be highly compressed

and fragmented; maybe some of its centres would be preserved in some universities (for example, the department of mechanics and mathematics and the faculty of physics at MSU) and in the military-industrial complex. Fundamental science will be increasingly transformed into applied science, because the successful development of basic research requires special intellectual and institutional environment promoting free submissions and discussions of scientific problems; the defense sector, in the absence of RAS, can not ensure such an environment, of course. The forecasted evolution of the system will be aggravated by the resignation of active and able-bodied researchers, including youth and by their leaving the country, by the loss of academic traditions and culture, by the replacement of leaving scientists with adventurers, climbers, rouges and other human “scum”, inevitably popping up in the periods of stagnation and troubles, triggered by large-scale destructive reforms.

5. Summary conclusions and recommendations

The main ones, addressed to the persons, making governmental decisions in the sphere of Russia’s scientific development, are the following. You should not look up to the “West” with adoration and jealousy; and you should not blindly seek to adopt someone else’s, in particular, American system of organization of science, without a clear understanding of its merits, and, most importantly, weaknesses. This approach will inevitably aggravate the situation: our own problems will multiply by serious flaws of the foreign system, which in all of its surface splendor is itself facing difficult challenges. The only reasonable efforts would consist in the conservation and development (of course, not ignoring foreign experience) of the unique Russian scientific-research sphere that is fundamentally different from Western science; these differences are not in the least a disadvantage of Russia’s science;

¹ The latest shocking examples of its utilization in directly the opposite interests are given in the article: Dmitrieva O. Specifics of state property management in the Russian Federation. Russian economic journal. 2013. No. 2.

on the contrary, they are its most important competitive advantage. It is crucially important to aim the Russian science toward the increase in its contribution to the development of Russia's economy, industry, and high-tech sectors. And we can not place a priority on publishing research results in foreign journals, following the attempts to copy foreign forms of organizing research activities. Results of

domestic scientific achievements should be published in the Russian language and Russian media; if this information is of interest abroad, let them translate the articles into English, as it was practiced in the past.

In conclusion, it remains only to repeat the title of this article and, following many other experts, to call on the public to react adequately to the next forthcoming Herostratos action.