

Chapter 9

The State as the Driver of Competitiveness in Russian Higher Education: The Case of Project 5-100

Isak Froumin¹ and Mikhail Lisyutkin²

Abstract

This chapter begins with explanations of the historical transformations and peculiarities of the Soviet higher education system. It describes the Soviet government's interpretations of university competitiveness, which have influenced the current state of the Russian higher education system. Then the chapter discusses the post-Soviet path of Russian universities in their search for balance between the de-Sovietization and Westernization of higher education. The discussion proceeds to outlining the new environment of global competition among universities, shaped by world university rankings and the rapid expansion of governmental policies in higher education. Finally, the chapter describes how the Russian government is reacting to the changing environment and the policies used to enhance higher education competitiveness. We consider, as a case study, the Russian excellence initiative in higher education – Project 5-100 – whose basic idea is that at least five Russian universities will be ranked among the world's top 100 universities by 2020. Some lessons for future policies and questions for future research are formulated in the concluding part.

Introduction

In different countries, the growth of competitiveness among higher education institutions is driven in a variety of ways. In some countries, universities are the main drivers. In others, the state performs the main function of pushing universities to compete internationally. Most of the research focuses on the development strategies driven by the universities

¹ National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russian Federation; ifroumin@hse.ru.

² National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russian Federation; mlisyutkin@hse.ru.

themselves. Also, the body of research considering the strategies of those governments aiming to push or incentivize universities to increase their international competitiveness has grown significantly in recent years.

The key role of the state in ensuring the competitiveness of higher education is evidenced by the fact that many governments implement policies to drive excellence and initiatives promoting the global research university model (Mohrman, Ma, & Baker, 2008). During the first decade of the present century, more than 40 such policies were launched in more than 20 countries (Salmi, 2009). The total investments in these projects exceeded US\$50 billion. Such investments are made because many states perceive higher education systems as tools of international legitimacy and advancement. They push universities to compete on the world stage by offering them additional funding and setting challenging targets (Salmi & Froumin, 2013). Both China and Russia provide examples of this approach in the development of their higher education systems and institutions.

For example, the Chinese government launched the 985 Project in 1998, which mandated that universities concentrate on their international competitiveness. Leading Chinese universities have shown significant progress, demonstrated by global rankings. Salmi shows that China is the leader among countries implementing excellence initiatives according to the number of new universities entered in the top 500 world-class universities during the last 10 years. An additional 28 universities were ranked by Shanghai Jiao Tong University in 2015 in comparison with 2004 (Salmi, 2016).

Taking into account the lessons drawn from China's government initiatives and the success of Chinese universities, the Russian Federation established in 2012 a similar initiative, called Project 5-100, which aims to drive leading Russian universities to become more globally competitive. The Russian policy design is similar to China's 985 Project and the German Universities Excellence Initiative (Froumin & Lisyutkin, 2015). At the same time, however, Russia's policy implementation differs significantly from its Chinese and German counterparts. Specifically, the government not only defines the framework for university development but also directly manages the higher education system and, to some extent, particular universities. This is why understanding the role of the Russian government is crucial to understanding how states can influence the development of higher education systems around the world.

The first part of this chapter explains the historical transformations and peculiarities of the Soviet higher education system. It describes the

Soviet government's interpretations of university competitiveness, which have influenced the current state of the Russian higher education system. The second section discusses the post-Soviet path of Russian universities in their search for balance between the de-Sovietization and the Westernization of higher education. The third section explains the new environment of global competition among universities, shaped by world university rankings and the rapid expansion of governmental policies in higher education. Finally, the fourth section describes how the Russian government is reacting to the changing environment and the policies it is using to enhance higher education competitiveness. Some lessons for future policies and questions for future research are formulated in the concluding part of the chapter.

Soviet Higher Education in a Non-competitive Environment

Most of the Russian universities existing today were established at the end of the 1930s as part of a Soviet higher education "project" (Froumin, Kouzminov, & Semyonov, 2014), whereby the government rigidly organized the higher education system. These institutions were usually controlled by particular ministries, with key processes fully centralized (Kouzminov, Semyonov, & Froumin, 2013). Mandatory graduate job placement, state-regulated curricula, and niche specialization were the main characteristics of the system, enabling the government to regulate the structure and the quality of human resource development. All the activities of Soviet higher education institutions were strictly controlled by the government, including international cooperation. Central authorities controlled and managed all academic mobility. The main objective of mobility was not cooperation but the conveyance of the Soviet (or communist) ideology. International mobility was practically 239nternational.

The organization of the system was based on the idea that higher education is part of the complex government machine. Universities performed the function of producing the appropriate workforce according to the needs of the state and particular industries. Because the Soviet government was the primary employer, researchers named this system "quasi-corporate" higher education (Kouzminov et al., 2013). The government saw the higher education system as simply part of the "mechanism" functioning in accordance with the needs of the Soviet "machine."

The Soviet higher education system was not considered by the government, in terms of its competitiveness, separately from other “parts of the machine.” In this context, it was an integral part of the socioeconomic system. There was no need for the Soviet government to compare its higher education system with other systems, particularly Western ones, because it differed so much. There was an assumption that Soviet higher education was competitive by default; it was considered impossible and unnecessary to prove otherwise. This attitude remained fundamental to the system until the end of the 1980s. The collapse of the USSR changed the environment: the system of higher education started to transform significantly, both naturally and through government efforts.

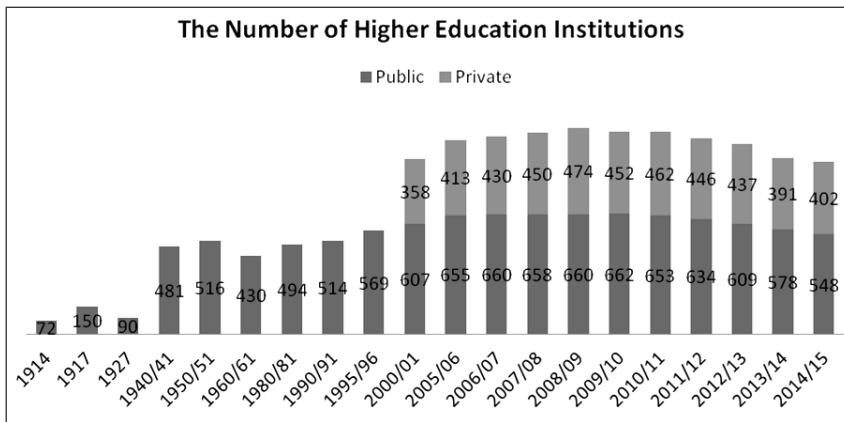
Post-Soviet Development of Higher Education: The Emerging Discourse of Global Competitiveness

The operating conditions for higher education changed significantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Mandatory graduate job placement was eliminated, and universities were given more autonomy (Bain, 2003). The economy was reshaped as some industries declined dramatically, while some new ones were established. Originally created to execute the orders of the state, the Russian higher education system found itself challenged by new demands. Households and new business entities became new stakeholders (Froumin et al., 2014). Both the universities and the government (as their founder) had to find the best way to respond to the new demands, and their responses determined public policy on both higher education and the development of universities. This created the foundation for the current state of Russian higher education, which will be discussed in the next part of the chapter.

An even more important characteristic of that period is that a new competitive environment was established. Universities were allowed to recruit fee-paying students, and the government passed legislation allowing the establishment of private higher education institutions. Public universities, which used to function in a non-competitive environment, were forced to compete for fee-paying students because of government budgetary restraints during the early post-Soviet years (Klyachko et al., 2002). They also had to compete with new private universities, which rapidly responded to demands for improved higher education degrees (in economics and humanities, mostly) (Lisyutkin & Froumin, 2015). In just 15 years, more than 400 private higher education institutions were created,

and the number of fee-paying students rose dramatically. Currently, almost 50% of students pay for their higher education. (See figure 9.1.)

Figure 9.1. Number of higher education institutions in the Russian Federation.



Source: Federal State Statistics Service (2016).

In addition to the domestic competition among universities triggered after the breakup of the Soviet Union, competition with international universities emerged, as local stakeholders began comparing national education and research with international counterparts. International organizations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank conducted studies on Russian higher education (OECD, 1998; World Bank, 1998). Mobility and openness increased the opportunity for comparison.

The Russian government, being both the stakeholder and the regulator of higher education, had to respond to these changes and emerging demands. It had to incorporate its higher education system into the market and make it comparable with other systems. As a result, it began the transformation of its higher education system according to the principles of the Bologna Declaration. A two-tier higher education model was adopted to make Russian higher education internationally recognized and comparable for the first time. Conceptually, the idea was also to increase the international mobility of students and research and teaching staff. The number of international students was the first and only instrument used to measure international competitiveness at that time. (See figure 9.2.)

Figure 9.2. Number of foreign students studying in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic and the Russian Federation.



Source: Arefiev & Sheregi (2014).

Despite the increase in the number of foreign students in Russian universities, the relative share of international students was still low. (This can be partly explained by the fact that the number of domestic students in general increased more rapidly.) Most foreign students were also still coming mostly from the “socialist camp” countries (Arefiev & Sheregi, 2014). This fact hardly reflects a genuine increase in competitiveness or internationalization of national higher education institutions. Moreover, the Russian government and experts realized that a change in the number of foreign students did not necessarily reflect the fact that a university performs its activities on an international level. For example, some universities could have a very low number of foreign students, but still be recognized as internationally competitive.

Meanwhile, international comparisons led to the recognition that Russia needed to implement a new model. Inspired by international discussions about world-class university models (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Sadlack & Liu, 2009; Salmi, 2009), the Russian government designed a policy aimed at developing a group of research universities oriented toward international markets. As part of the policy, a group of 29 national research universities was selected and given financial support. These universities were expected to become entry points for global knowledge and technology networks. It should be noted that the same idea for

supporting universities was promoted by the 211 Project implemented by the Chinese government.

A preliminary analysis of the Russian research university program shows significant positive results. The ratio of international students at national research universities doubled from 2006 to 2012, and the universities' average research and development (R&D) revenue tripled, to US\$28.5 million in 2011 from US\$8.8 million in 2006. The average number of papers published in journals indexed by national and international citation databases increased by 139% over the same period of time (from 343 papers in 2006 to 821 papers in 2011 per university, on average). One more important result of the program was the intensification of the universities' cooperation with innovative companies and technological platforms (NTF, 2015).

Initially, the national research universities were largely guided by the perception of competitiveness in the national higher education market; they had no direct objectives in terms of world university rankings. These universities were to be developed and evaluated only in comparison with one another. Certainly, they attracted the most talented students, researchers, and teachers and have shown significant progress in research and development activities. As a result, the government received high marks for this program. However, the introduction of world university rankings a few years later significantly changed the competitive landscape and the policy agenda (Altbach, Yudkevich, & Runbley, 2016; Hazelkorn, 2007, 2011).

After world university rankings were introduced, it became possible to objectively compare Russian higher education institutions with universities in other countries. As a result, the government was criticized as Russian higher education institutions were exposed as laggards trailing far behind their international counterparts. World university rankings quickly became one of the top issues in Russian higher education policy development. The government responded to the criticism in 2012 with a program aimed at promoting leading Russian universities to the top positions in these rankings by improving their competitiveness in global research and education (Froumin & Povalko, 2014). The Russian "excellence initiative" (Kehm & Pasternack, 2009) was named Project 5-100, reflecting the government's aim to vault at least five leading universities (out of the 21 selected for the project in the two phases of its implementation – 15 and 6, respectively) into the top 100 universities in the main international rankings of higher education institutions – e.g.,

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), Times Higher Education (THE), and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU).

Given that Project 5-100 represents the most significant approach to making Russian higher education institutions internationally competitive, it is given particular consideration in this chapter. The questions to be discussed in this case study (besides the project itself) include the global context and the reasons for the policy. The design of the world university rankings as a trigger for the launch of Project 5-100 and the evaluation framework for the progress of both the project and the universities is considered in the next part of the chapter. This is then followed by a discussion of analogous policies implemented by other foreign countries that could serve as a reference point for the Russian case.

World University Rankings and Excellence-Driven Policies

The continued influence of world university rankings has largely determined the global contextualization of Russian higher education policies. Over recent years, the rankings have become one of the top issues on the government's higher education policy agenda. As an effective (but controversial) instrument for measuring international university performance, the world university rankings have affected many higher education systems by stimulating global competition (Froumin & Lisytukin, 2015; Sadlak, 2011).

The methodology used to evaluate the performance of higher education institutions is, to a large extent, predicated on how governments understand competitiveness in higher education. The methodologies used to create the rankings also influence universities' activities and priorities. The methodologies of the three most influential rankings (Academic Ranking of World Universities; QS World University Rankings; Times Higher Education World Universities Rankings) were considered so that we could understand how they influence the design of public policies and universities' priorities for development.

The criteria used by these ranking systems tend to concentrate on research productivity and quality. The characteristics of international performance are expressed primarily by the number of international faculty and students. The weight of the criteria measuring the level of internationalization of a university is relatively low. At the same time, the weight of a university's reputation, which is articulated by the opinions of international academics and employers, is significant.

This means that the world university rankings promote a specific model of international competitiveness in higher education (Altbach et al., 2016). Consequently, they set the standards for the model of an internationally competitive university, which demonstrates research productivity, internationalization of staff and students, and high quality of teaching. The rankings define the ideal internationally competitive university as one that hires international academic experts, has representatives at international companies, promotes quality education, and makes a significant contribution to scientific advancement. Because the role of the world university rankings has risen dramatically, universities and governments have changed their focus to align with this new model of international competitiveness in higher education. Governments lend special support to, and universities concentrate their efforts on, the activities measured by the rankings.

Surprisingly, governments seem to be even more active players of the rankings game than universities. This can be observed by the fact that more than 20 countries have specific programs, mostly known as excellence-driven policies and initiatives, aimed at pushing their national universities to the top of the world university rankings. Most of these policies, including the Chinese 985 Project, were introduced by the Russian government before launching its Project 5-100. The results of this analysis exerted great influence on the design and implementation of the Russian analogue. Before moving to the details of Project 5-100, we will introduce similar projects, adopted as strategic choices by other governments. It may be helpful to consider these “excellence initiatives,” as well as the ways in which the Russian government made its own strategic choice, to understand the development of the Russian higher education system and the selected universities.

Excellence-driven policies and initiatives have been considered by many countries, but it has recently become common practice. As Sadlak and Liu noted in 2009, “more and more countries are joining the race of building up world-class universities by establishing special initiatives” (p. 16). Over time, these initiatives have changed the focus of the higher education policy discourse from overall quality maintenance to supporting a limited number of universities aimed at achieving world-class status or global excellence (Altbach & Salmi, 2011). Large countries like China and Russia have also tried to address the issue of regional development by establishing world-class universities in regions or macro-regions (Froumin & Lisyutkin, 2015).

Our analysis of the excellence-driven policies and initiatives implemented by more than 20 countries has shown that when beginning such projects, governments have to adopt a specific strategy that will influence the manner in which higher education policies are implemented and how universities approach their own development (Froumin & Lisyutkin, 2015). The government's chosen approach to supporting universities and the amount of autonomy they give each institution determine policy design and the degree of government involvement in university strategies and operations.

The first strategic decision is related to the way in which governments drive universities to accelerate their development and global competitiveness. They must answer the following questions: Do the governments establish systems of external administration of higher education institutions, or do they give autonomy to universities? Do the governments "steer from a distance," or do they establish instruments allowing interference in the universities' day-to-day activities? Both variants have their pros and cons. Control of universities allows governments to allocate resources more effectively, monitor results, influence the research agenda, etc. At the same time, it significantly limits universities' autonomy; this is arguably one of the most important characteristics of Russian universities (Bain, 2003).

The second strategic decision could be a derivative of the first, but it could also be made independently (such as in the German excellence initiative model). It is related to governmental support of – in other words, governmental influence on – the programs that drive the rapid development of universities and the increase in their global competitiveness. Before starting their excellence program, governments must identify cost-effective instruments that will trigger the strategic development of their universities. The most important challenge for governments is to decide whether they should support the development of a whole university or just particular departments and "centers of excellence" as the most efficient way to make it internationally competitive. These choices influence the ways in which the excellence initiatives are being implemented. The Russian government appears to be still trying to find the best solutions to these strategic questions while implementing Project 5-100.

While governmental interpretations and principles differ substantially from case to case, an analysis of excellence-driven policies

and initiatives shows that, generally, all countries build their supporting programs on the basis of the following three key ideas:

- 1. Governments seek to ensure efficient allocation of scarce financial resources.** The universities that participate in such programs are supported financially. Governments must therefore identify ways to ensure the best use of funds and methods for monitoring their spending.
- 2. Governments seek to develop an appropriate system for program implementation and quality assurance.** Before the programs are launched, governments need to understand the intended results and identify the key steps to achieve these goals. Quality assurance or monitoring systems are established by governments to measure progress.
- 3. Governments seek to establish or ensure the optimal conditions for international mobility.** The attractiveness of universities for international students and faculty is considered to be one of the determining factors for global competitiveness. As a result, governments make particular efforts to stimulate free academic mobility.

The approaches used by governments to incorporate these choices into the design of their higher education excellence policies determine the subsequent implementation process. More important, governments' strategic decisions determine the eventual design of particular policies. Moreover, the historical features of higher education systems and universities shape the challenges that governments have to address while designing and implementing these policies. This point will be elaborated in detail in the following section by using the Russian Project 5-100 as an example. It enables us to identify the particular challenges that the Russian government faced when it launched its higher education excellence initiative. A hypothesis could be made that it was primarily the legacy of the Soviet Union that determined most of the challenges faced by the Russian government. Another important issue is the decisions the government made when exploring mechanisms to develop the international competitiveness of its universities.

Project 5-100 as the Driver of Russian Universities' International Competitiveness

Russia joined the race for excellence in higher education in 2013 as the government prioritized gaining international recognition for its leading national universities. Russia (like most other countries) adopted open competition to select particular universities to promote internationally. China was an exception; it picked universities for its 985 Project after reviewing their individual performance and potential (Froumin & Lisyutkin, 2015). Although it is too early to evaluate the results of the Russian program, it is possible to discuss the way the program was designed, taking into account the strategic decisions and basic priorities, which were discussed previously. It is also possible to consider the way this program is being implemented and explore the changes that have taken place in the government's approach to driving universities toward rapid development and international competitiveness.

The Russian excellence policy, known as Project 5-100, is a recent initiative of the federal government to foster the transformation of top-tier national universities to world-class status. Its basic purpose is to provide leading universities with federal government support (especially financial) to increase their academic productivity and international reputation and, consequently, to push universities to compete globally with the best universities in the world.

Soviet Legacies

The Russian government found itself in a challenging situation because of the historical peculiarities of the Soviet-era dependency of higher education institutions on the government. Some particular characteristics of that higher education system left an imprint on Russian universities' subsequent development in terms of their productivity, competitiveness, and international presence. The past 20 years of Russian higher education have shown that these organizational (or functional) attributes of the Soviet legacy are unlikely to be reformed from within the universities themselves.

Soviet-era research activities were concentrated in the Academy of Sciences and not in the universities (Froumin et al., 2014). The universities were primarily focused on teaching. This means that Russian universities lagged behind their international counterparts as research productivity largely determines the competitive position of modern universities. China

shares a similar legacy with the Russian Federation as its research was concentrated primarily in the Chinese Academy of Science.

Another important factor is that the Soviet Union was mostly closed to international markets. The government's concentration on domestic needs and its strict control of the economy (including higher education) resulted in universities with very limited experience with international cooperation. Most never considered promoting their research and education activities globally or attempting to attract foreign faculty or international students. They were unaccustomed to establishing transparent and effective systems of professional recruitment. Academic inbreeding was common practice (Yudkevich & Sivak, 2015) because a large number of faculty consisted of a university's own graduates. To become internationally competitive, universities need to attract the best researchers and professors from all over the world; this is very challenging when there is no tradition of open recruitment.

Another legacy of the Soviet period that constrains the international competitiveness of the Russian higher education system and its institutions (especially when they are measured by a ranking system) is the sectoral or industrial focus of particular universities (Froumin et al., 2014). Many highly specialized higher education institutions are related to closed (in terms of international cooperation) economic clusters such as defense, aerospace, and other strategically important industries. Their research productivity is high, but the results of their activities rarely enter the public domain. An extreme example of the unique characteristics of the higher education system in Russia is that medical schools and universities have been separate institutions since the time of the Soviet Union. Medical schools were controlled by the ministry responsible for health care, and individual medical schools could not compete with the world's best comprehensive universities. At the same time, an analysis of the world's leading universities shows that most of them include medical schools as subdivisions, providing a significant contribution to their international competitiveness and research productivity.

Moreover, Russian universities (even the leading ones) lack experience in technology transfer and commercialization of their research and development activities. Most of them performed a workforce-production function for specific industries and companies, steered by the Soviet government. As a result, many Russian universities find it challenging to start partnerships with companies (and certainly with international ones).

Another major challenge for Russian higher education institutions relates to the specific research agenda and the language used by Russian researchers to publish their academic results (Yudkevich, 2014). During Soviet times, Russian was the only language of communication used by university faculty, so they had to make great efforts to switch to English as a language of international communication. Their Chinese counterparts faced the same challenge of adopting English as a major tool for international publication, but they made efforts to change this situation much earlier.

The Russian government sought appropriate mechanisms to drive higher education institutions toward excellence, while dealing with the challenges created by the Soviet legacy and attempting to reconcile them with the international competitiveness required by world university rankings. This government initiative could be identified as the need for a so-called de-Sovietization of higher education. On the one hand, de-Sovietization included dealing with the “path dependence” of the universities. On the other hand, it consisted of policies aimed at nurturing a positive environment for the development of, and increase in, the competitiveness of Russian universities. It could be argued that Project 5-100 was designed and is being implemented as a meaningful response to this need.

Strategic Decisions

Regarding the strategic decisions made in the Russian government’s design and implementation of its higher education excellence policies, it should be noted that, from the very beginning, the government focused on the university as the principal recipient of support in Project 5-100. The first 15 universities that participated in the project were given relatively more autonomy in the national regulatory framework of higher education. They were allowed to create curricula according to their own standards, and they were given more freedom to manage funds from income-generating activities. At the same time, their autonomy over their operational management was limited (Froumin & Povalko, 2014). Their accountability to the government on some issues increased in frequency (e.g., by 10 times: from one report every five years to one report twice a year).

The government developed a series of instruments to control the speed and direction of the universities’ development. Universities that participate in Project 5-100 are obliged to formulate detailed plans, called

roadmaps, for developing their international competitiveness. The government monitors the progress of these universities against their roadmaps, including the 251Internatio of their key performance indicators. The government also established a system of indicators to drive and “guide” universities toward global excellence. These indicators included not only a position in the most influential world university rankings (QS, ARWU, THE) but also indicators measuring universities’ performance and progress. These include entrants’ average scores in the Russian Unified State Examination and the ratio of non-budgetary funding for admitted students. Universities are also allowed to include additional specific indicators in their strategic development roadmaps.

Cumulatively, the set of indicators developed both by the government and by the universities shows that Project 5-100 supports the development of participating universities. At the same time, the Russian government significantly interferes in the universities’ strategic and operational activities by imposing specific performance indicators. In addition, the government has specified requirements for the universities’ management systems. The universities that were selected for Project 5-100 had to establish steering committees and international advisory boards. They were also strongly advised by the government to hire consultancy firms or higher education experts to help them correct their development plans, build effective management structures, and develop financial models for performance.

The government has developed a strict system of financial support for Project 5-100 universities to drive the development of their international competitiveness. Table 9.1 outlines the activities its supports.

Table 9.1 Government-Supported Activities of Project 5-100 Universities

Activity	Description
International research and education projects	New educational programs conducted jointly with leading foreign and Russian universities and research institutions
	R&D projects jointly conducted with international and leading national companies
	World-class or breakthrough fundamental and applied research
	Implementation of research projects and development of subdivisions or centers of excellence headed by leading international and national experts

International recruitment	Recruitment of top university management and young faculty with experience in leading foreign and national universities and research institutions
	Recruitment of international students
Professional development	Development of programs supporting international and national academic mobility and faculty professional development
	Development of support for initiatives of young faculty and promising students

Source: Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation N 211 (2013).

Table 9.1 outlines how the government perceives the international competitiveness of its higher education institutions. It also shows that the internationalization of research and education as well as of the faculty and student body is at the top of the project agenda.

Universities participating in Project 5-100 do not receive equal sums of money from the government to increase their international competitiveness. Instead, better performance is rewarded with additional government funding. Participating universities are expected to aspire to become among the best universities that adhere to the indicators established by the government.

In terms of first steps, the project's preliminary results are very promising. In 2013, the 5-100 universities made pledges that appeared too ambitious to achieve. However, most of them demonstrated energy and creativity that is remarkable for such a short period of time. With a few exceptions, the participating universities achieved all their performance indicators for 2014, some at a much higher level than planned. For example, one of the universities increased the proportion of its international faculty to 7% from just 1% and the proportion of international students to 23% from 18%.

In 2014, the number of international publications increased, on average, by 25% and citations by 153%. The number of international research journals published by Project 5-100 universities and indexed by Web of Science and Scopus doubled. The same year, the universities recruited more than 100 top managers and more than 650 young researchers and teachers, who had previously worked at leading international and national universities and research centers; they also organized approximately 3,500 academic mobility programs and opened over 500 educational programs (including short-term professional

development programs). In 2013–2014, the universities implemented more than 1,700 projects jointly with leading researchers, research institutions, and high-tech companies.

The universities that participate in Project 5-100 have also shown a significant improvement in the world university rankings. In 2012, only eight participating universities were ranked by QS; in 2013, two more universities entered the rankings, while in 2014, 12 universities were ranked by QS. In 2015, two universities entered the top 100 world universities, according to the QS rankings by subject. In other ranking systems (ARWU, THE), Project 5-100 universities did not achieve such good results, but they demonstrated significant progress.

In 2016, Project 5-100 underwent a significant transformation. The group of participating universities was enlarged, from 15 to 21; this can be interpreted as a result of the intermediate success of the project. At the same time, the government decided to change the approach to university support and evaluation: all the universities should establish specific units, called strategic academic units, to boost research productivity and the quality of education in breakthrough areas.

The universities that participate in Project 5-100 have created such strategic academic units and designed programs for their development. The government has evaluated the development programs of these units (but not the development programs of the universities as a whole). Taking into consideration the first strategic decision discussed earlier, it should be noted that the Russian government has changed its approach from supporting an entire participating university to supporting specific units. Regarding the second strategic decision in the governmental push toward university international competitiveness, the strategic academic units idea is a reflection of the fact that the universities' autonomy is significantly constrained because the government still maintains control over their efforts and resources. It is fair to say that the Russian government is moving toward "manual steering" of university development (implying less institutional autonomy), while searching for new management and support instruments and decisions.

Concluding Remarks

Analysis of Russia's Project 5-100 reveals that the autonomy of universities is one of the most sensitive issues in the implementation of higher education excellence policies. Recently, the Russian government has decided that strategic academic units should be identified by individual universities and evaluated and supported by the government. This means

that the government is one step closer to direct interference in the universities' strategic development and operational activities. It also means that respecting university autonomy should be considered carefully when designing government measures to stimulate university development. The outcome of such initiatives will be measured in the years to come. It can be argued that the Russian government is applying Soviet mechanisms of strict control to the process of de-Sovietization as it develops the universities' international competitiveness. It can be affirmed that the future challenge for the state (both Russia and China) as it pushes universities to be competitive is to nurture the agency of higher education institutions themselves (Hasse & Krücken, 2013).

An important question that needs further elaboration is how much influence is exerted by the Project 5-100 universities (the internationally competitive universities) on other universities in the country and beyond. Despite the fact that a limited number of higher education institutions is being supported by the government, the hypothesis could be made that other Russian universities will catch up and practice de-Sovietization as well, following the trend of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The analysis of changes in Russian university rankings suggests that, in some countries, government-steered excellence initiatives do work (Froumin & Lisyutkin, 2015). Special efforts by governments contribute significantly to the international competitiveness of universities measured by the rankings. China and Russia, as participants in the excellence initiatives "race," can demonstrate an increase in the number of highly ranked universities. At the same time, numbers and figures cannot reflect all the transformations that have taken place inside the universities. However, a more important issue is the nature of the measures and instruments that have enabled Project 5-100 and 985 Project universities to obtain such results. For example, what is happening inside the universities to produce such results? What exactly are the universities doing to become more international and competitive? What challenges do they face while accepting the "rules of the excellence game"? These questions are worth careful consideration to obtain a better understanding of the influence of excellence-driven policies in general, and Projects 5-100 and 985 in particular, on university development.

References

- Altbach, P. G., & Salmi, J. (2011). *The road to academic excellence: The making of world-class research universities*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Altbach, P. G., Yudkevich, M., & Rumbley, L. (2016). *The global academic rankings game. Changing institutional policy, practice, and academic life*. London: Routledge.
- Arefiev, A., & Sheregi, F. (2014). *Inostrannye 255nterna v rossijskih vuzah* [International students at the Russian universities]. Moscow: Center for Sociological Research.
- Bain, O. (2003). *University autonomy in the Russian Federation since perestroika*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation N 211. (2013). O merah gosudarstvennoj podderzhki vedushhih universitetov Rossijskoj Federacii v celjah povyshenija ih konkurentosposobnosti sredi vedushhih mirovyh nauchno-obrazovatel'nyh centrov [On the measures of state support of the leading Russian universities in order to enhance their competitiveness among the world's leading research and education centers].
- DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 147–160.
- Federalnaya sluzhba gosudarstvennoj statistiki [Federal State Statistics Service]. (2015). *Ofitsialnaya statistika. Naselenie. Obrazovanie* [Official Statistics. Population. Education]. Retrieved from http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/education/#
- Froumin, I., Kouzminov, Y., & Semyonov, D. (2014). Institutional diversity in Russian higher education: Revolutions and evolution. *European Journal of Higher Education* 4(3), 209–234. Doi: 10.1080/21568235.2014.916532
- Froumin, I., & Lisjutkin, M. (2015). Excellence-driven policies and initiatives in the context of Bologna process: Rationale, design, implementation and outcomes. In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, & P. Scott (Eds.), *The European higher education area: Between critical reflections and future policies* (pp. 257–275). Springer.
- Froumin, I., & Povalko, A. (2014). Top down push for excellence: Lesson from Russia. In Y. Cheng, Q. Wang, & N. C. Liu (Eds.), *How world-class universities affect global higher education* (pp. 47–63). Sense Publishers.

- Hasse, R., & Krücken, G. (2013). Competition and Actorhood: A further expansion of the neo-institutional agenda. *Sociologia Internationalis*, 51(2), 181–205.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2007). The impact of league tables and rankings systems on higher education decision making. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 19(2), 1–24.
- Hazelkorn, E. (2011). *Globalization and the reputation race in rankings and the reshaping of higher education: The battle for world wide excellence*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Kehm, B., & Pasternack, P. (2009). The German “excellence initiative” and its role in restructuring the national higher education landscape. In D. Palfreyman & T. Tapper (Eds.), *Structuring mass higher education: The role of elite institutions* (113–128). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Klyachko, T., Titova, N., Kryshchanovsky, A., Mikhailyuk, M., Drugov, M., Vasiliev, D., Kapranova, L., Zaborovskaya, A., & Zaretskaya, S. (2002). *Strategii adaptatsii vysshikh uchebnykh zavedeniy: ekonomicheskii i sotsiologicheskii aspekty* [Adaptation strategies of the higher education institutions: An economic and a sociological aspects]. Moscow: HSE.
- Kouzminov, Y., Semyonov, D., & Froumin, I. (2013). Struktura vuzovskoi seti: ot sovetского k rossiyskomu masterplanu [HEIs network structure: From the Soviet to the Russian masterplan]. *Voprosy obrazovaniya* [Educational Studies] 4, 8–63.
- Lisyutkin, M., & Froumin, I. (2015). How do universities degrade? *Russian Education & Society*, 57(6), 442–458. Doi: 10.1080/10609393.2015.1096136
- Mohrman, K., Ma, W., & Baker, D. (2008). The research university in transition: the emerging global model. *Higher Education Policy*, 21, 5–27.
- NTF (National Training Foundation). (2015). *Sozdanoie i razvitie seti federal'nyh i nacional'nyh issledovatel'skih universitetov: 2009–2014*. [Establishment and development of the network of federal and national research universities: 2009–2014]. Moscow: Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). (1998). *Reviews of national policies for education: Russian Federation 1998*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264162860-en>

- Sadlak, J. (2011). *Ranking in higher education: Its place and impact*. The Europa World of Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.educationarena.com/pdf/sample/sample-essay-sadlak.pdf>
- Sadlak, J., & Liu, N. C. (2009). "World-class": Aspirations and reality checks. In J. Sadlak & N. C. Liu (Eds.), *The world-class university as part of a new higher education paradigm: From institutional quality to systemic excellence* (pp.13-22). Bucharest, Cluj, Shanghai: UNESCO-CEPES, Cluj University Press, and Shanghai Jiao Tong University.
- Salmi, J. (2009). *The challenge of establishing world-class universities*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Salmi, J. (2016). Excellence initiatives to create world-class universities: Do they work? *Higher Education Evaluation and Development*, 10(1), 1–29.
- Salmi, J., & Froumin, I. (2013). Excellence initiatives to establish world-class universities: Evaluation of recent experiences. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 1, 25–69.
- World Bank. (1998). *Technical and vocational education and training in Russia*. Country Study Summary.
- Yudkevich, M. (2014). The Russian university: recovery and rehabilitation. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(8), 1463–1474. Doi: 10.1080/03075079.2014.949537
- Yudkevich, M., & Sivak, E. (2015). Academic immobility and inbreeding in Russian universities. In M. Yudkevich, P. G. Altbach, & L. E. Rumbley (Eds.), *Academic inbreeding and mobility in higher education: Global Perspectives* (pp. 130–155). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.