

Science and innovation policy of the new Russian cabinet

By Liliana Proskuryakova

The new Russian cabinet that was formed after the presidential elections in spring 2012 marked new priorities of science, technology and innovation (STI) policy. Dmitry Livanov, Rector of the National University of Science and Technology "MISIS", was appointed the new Education and Science Minister. Previously Dr. Livanov already spent three years in the Ministry as Director of Department and Vice Minister (2004-2007). The new Minister holds a doctorate degree in physics and mathematics from MISIS.

One of the first initiatives of Dr. Livanov was the creation of an 'open ministry', including the establishment of open spaces for discussion of particular decisions and initiatives, and the organization of a civil society council by the Ministry, headed by the Nobel prize winner in physics (2000) Z. Alferov. The new team of top officials consists of practitioners - researchers and professors, while some career civil servants left the Ministry. It is also planned to create a network for professional evaluation of projects of key importance. Both the expert council and the network will comprise a wide range of stakeholders.

At a recent meeting devoted to modernization of the Russian economy, which has remained high on the agenda of the Russian leaders since 2000, the PM announced a planned 30% increase in the share of high-tech and knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy by 2018 (as compared to the 2011 level). At a meeting of the expert group on entrepreneurship at universities and research centers in August 2012 Mr. Medvedev also underlined the lack of investment, which could be resolved by venture funding and state funds support. He also suggested the possibility of IPO by selected new innovative companies at the specially created international stock markets.

The 2012 presidential decree features more immediate actions in the sphere of science and technology (S&T), including further advancement of the leading universities internationally, an increase in budget allocations for state science funds¹ (up to RUB 25 bln by 2018) and competitive funding to university-performed R&D. It should be noted that Russian universities hold weak positions in the Russian innovation system. As compared with OECD and BRICS the input of the Russian higher education sector in basic research is one of the lowest (it varies from 80% in Ireland and Denmark to 20% in Korea, Great Britain and Russia). To address this and other weaknesses the recent move of the ex-Minister Fursenko was to strengthen the research capacities of the Russian universities and to improve their connections with Russian companies.

Considering the mentioned tendency, an important factor is the attraction of highly qualified professors. The authors of an international comparative survey of academic profession note that Russia is characterized by low internal mobility, most universities have little flexibility to increase salaries for better performing faculty, and the average professors wage often fall 10% below the average wage of others in the economy who have completed higher education. Certain wage increases for

professorate (up to 200% of the average wage in each of Russia's regions) were previewed in a relatively long perspective - until 2018.

Another immediate action outlined in the 2012 presidential decree is the adoption of a long-term national basic research program (following the opinion expressed by some renowned commentators, such as Yaroslav Kuzminov, of the need to concentrate efforts on long-term priority-setting and strategies rather than daily routine). Such a program will facilitate reaching some key targets, for instance, increasing the share of Russian publications in the Web of Science journals up to 2,44%.

The difficult and long-pending reform of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), also highlighted in the OECD Innovation Review 2011, is currently not on the agenda of the new Minister, who previously criticized the Academy. Prime-Minister Medvedev earlier mentioned that it is up to the RAS itself to undertake internal reforms. Today the Academy remains by far the biggest recipient of the government R&D appropriations and is slowly moving towards a greater share of competitive funding in its budget.

The S&T development targets require budgetary support, but its prospects remain obscure. On the one hand, it is expected that Russian GERD will increase to 1,77% of GDP by 2015 and the share of appropriations to higher educational institutions will raise to 11,4% of GERD. On the other hand, the 2013-2015 Russia's draft budget already caused disagreement between the official and "open" (expert) governments. The experts claim that education and a few other sectors are underfunded, asserting that federal appropriations for education will decline by 7% (by 0,3% GDP down from 1% in 2012) and the planned salary increases in the educational sector will be assured by lowering the appropriations for applied research and subsidies to regional educational programs.

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¹ First of all the Foundation for Basic Research, Russian Foundation for Humanities, and the Foundation for Assistance to Small Innovative Enterprises.