

Kandidatskaya workshop

Friday, 11 November

Welcome, introduction

Speaking on behalf of Central European University (CEU), Budapest and the Open Society Institute, **Sophie Howlett**, Dean of CEU's Special and Extension Programmes, welcomed participants to the workshop, saying that this event is part of a series of discussions on the doctorate in the former Soviet Union and East-Central Europe, funded by the Higher Education Support Program. The first workshop in this series was organized at CEU Budapest in November 2004 by the Curriculum Resource Center (CRC), entitled "***Reconstructing the Doctorate in former Soviet Union and East-Central Europe***", and focused on the "academic basis" of what a doctorate program is and should be (see http://www.ceu.hu/crc/rec_doct.html). After that philosophical underpinning to the account on doctorates, CRC wanted to take the discussion into more practical terms, to start to consider the policy applications of some of the earlier academic considerations. This second workshop, therefore, was intended to pair academics with those responsible for higher education policy implementation and development at the ministerial level, or those in a position to give advice on policy issues at the ministerial level. The aim is to put forward policy considerations that enable the Higher Education Support Program help former communist countries in their post-graduate education reforms.

Unlike the first workshop in Budapest, where participants talked about doctoral programs worldwide, this particular event proposes to focus on the Candidate of Science Degree, the most important third tier program affecting the countries with which OSI higher education programs works. Reshaping the Candidate of Science Degree is probably the most crucial reorganization of the doctorate that will occur in the whole European higher education area, Sophie Howlett argued. The organizers of the workshop also felt that this is a very opportune time to think about the issue, as many former communist countries have either joined the Bologna declaration or are thinking about how they will relate the Bologna process to reforms in their higher education systems; and the question of the third level within Bologna has brought the re-conceptualisation of fSU scientific degrees onto the agenda for everybody.

Sophie Howlett said the 1990s was the time of rapid reform in many different countries but now with the Bologna process, now is the time to focus on the reorganization of the doctorate. She suggested that in the first part of the workshop participants share the experiences of their countries in the reorganization of bachelor and master degrees, as many of the problems of third cycle degrees are related to unsolved issues left over from the Baccalaureate and Magistrate. She proposed that the Candidate has to be seen in context, and the workshop participants needed to form and specify that new context to prepare for the later debate. Later on during the day discussions should be around a few other innovations that have been occurring outside of the Candidate of Science region that maybe of interest. After identifying the challenges for the countries in the former Soviet Union, participants would split into working groups to address specific issues regarding the organization of doctoral programs.

In his opening remarks, **Daniel Alexandrov**, professor at the European University at Saint Petersburg, reflected upon similarities he found in his earlier work in historical analysis and higher education reform. First, he said, all the changes in the educational system are socially similar to other modernization processes, and second, innovations in history have always been borrowed by other agents and adopted to local circumstances. He went on to say that the concept of modern university, as known in the former Soviet Union, was invented in Germany, but then, some hundred years later, was adopted by a large number of countries, including Japan and France. When Americans organized universities in the 1870s, they thought they were planting the German model on their ground. Today, however, there is little resemblance between the two higher education systems, as through the process of adaptation to local requirements, one always gets something different than the original. No matter what model Russia would follow in restructuring its higher education – be it the American or a different one - the result would ultimately be a Russian system.

Daniel Alexandrov proposed that the workshop should discuss the smoothest and least painful way to make Russian graduate education follow global trends. Instead of criticizing the existing system, one should work with stakeholders in finding the best ways to reform Russian higher education. He invited participants to share their experiences and ideas, and expressed his hope that a comparative discussion will help develop *recipes* to reach a political compromise with stakeholders.

Regarding the market of degrees in the post-Soviet space, Alexandrov pointed out that instead of a single market guided by academic reputation, in Russia there are two parallel markets. The first one is an administrative market that registers and approves all theses written in the country through the Higher Attestation Commission (VAC), while the other one is a shadow market of selling and buying degrees. Alexandrov referred to the work of a young sociologist, Kirill Titaev, a post-graduate student at European University at Saint Petersburg, who studied corruption at universities, and found the existence of illegal “services,” indeed agencies, that write theses for money.

According to statistical data, in Russian academia middle-aged people represent a relatively small proportion of scientists, Alexandrov explained. This means that scientists trained 20 years ago have spent some time in academia, but left the world of science after a couple of years. He expressed his concern that despite this migration of young intellectuals there is still an intellectual stagnation in the higher education system. In the world of science at least half of the people who go to doctoral schools cease to do academic research activities and go to work in business or somewhere else, he argued. These are the issues that need to be discussed during the workshop, rather than the highly philosophical concepts or minor details such as the required coursework in postgraduate studies, Alexandrov concluded, and invited participants to contribute with their own country’s experiences.