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Soviet Recognition of Foreign Higher Educational Credentials in the 1950–90s

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Приоритеты государственной политики СССР в сфере признания иностранных документов об образовании в 1950–90-х гг.

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Abstract: This article studies USSR's unique experience in recognizing credentials issued by foreign educational institutions. It pays particular attention to the special circumstances of the country's involvement in education internationally in this respect. Because its definitions of basic terms in higher education did not correspond with those of its Western partners, cooperation between the USSR and foreign countries was mostly limited to UNESCO's standards, as well as bilateral agreements with "friendly" states. In addition to analyzing the evolution of its legal aspects, the authors also study the evolution of the administrative apparatus for recognizing foreign degrees. Beginning in the 1970s, special units of Patrice Lumumba University and the Scientific Research Institute of Higher School Problems have made important contributions in this regard. The authors consider cooperation between the USSR and the leading international organizations, such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe, as well. At the same time, they also study the Soviet Union's first steps in recognizing foreign educational standards in light of changes in the international political climate. In short, the article discusses the challenges of recognizing foreign higher education qualifications in the Soviet Union as well as the institutions charged with the task from 1950 to the early 1990s.

Keywords: USSR, Soviet Union, recognition of foreign education, recognition of foreign qualifications, equivalence, international cooperation, UNESCO, Council of Europe

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Аннотация: Статья посвящена исследованию исторического опыта признания иностранных документов об образовании в Советском Союзе. Авторы приходят к выводу, что опыт СССР в указанной области является уникальным. Отдельное внимание в исследовании уделяется особым обстоятельствам вовлечения Советского Союза в международное образовательное пространство в рамках признания иностранного образования. Ввиду различных подходов к вопросам признания и несогласованных с западными партнерами позиций относительно основных определений терминов, относящихся к высшему образованию, сотрудничество с СССР с зарубежными государствами в основном ограничивалось нормативно-правовыми документами ЮНЕСКО, а также двусторонними соглашениями о признании квалификаций со странами «дружеского» лагеря. Кроме анализа эволюции правовых аспектов становления системы признания иностранного образования в СССР в работе исследовано изменение структуры административного советского аппарата,

занимающегося вопросами признания. Большой вклад в эту деятельность внесли начиная с 70-х годов специально созданные подразделения Университета дружбы народов имени Патриса Лумумбы и Научно-исследовательский институт проблем высшей школы. Отдельное внимание в работе уделяется сотрудничеству СССР с ведущими международными организациями, такими как ЮНЕСКО и Совет Европы. В статье также проанализированы начальные шаги российского государства по решению проблем признания иностранного образования, которые ввиду произошедших геополитических изменений неизбежно вышли на передний план. В работе представлены основные направления деятельности Советского Союза по решению проблем признания иностранных квалификаций, указаны основные организации и подразделения, принявшие непосредственное участие в решении данных вопросов.

Ключевые слова: Советский Союз, признание иностранного образования, признание иностранных квалификаций, эквивалентность, международное сотрудничество, ЮНЕСКО, Совет Европы

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Introduction

This article's research is relevant because of the growing interest in the evolution of higher education, its internationalization, increasing academic mobility, as well as in the dynamics and history of government policy in recognizing foreign educational credentials.

Until the Second World War, the Soviet Union considered education to be a platform for ideological struggle, and a completely autarchic system that did not need to import qualifications, knowledge or information from abroad.[1] Impressive achievements in rocketry, space and medical research in the postwar period seemed to confirm the validity of this approach, and guided the export of education to countries similarly hostile to the West.[2] However, in concluding agreements to cooperate in higher and vocational education with its European allies, as well as with many Asian and African countries, the need arose to recognize the validity of foreign degrees and diplomas.

At the same time, the Russian Federation's current international collaboration in higher education, which likewise requires accepting qualifications issued by its partners abroad, also justifies a look at similar approaches in the Soviet past. This is particularly relevant in the context of the "Concept of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in Training Personnel for Foreign Countries in Russian Educational Institutions," which was adopted on October 18, 2002 by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin.

The authors have consulted a variety of sources for their research, including legal acts and other official documents involving educational activities and international academic mobility. In addition, they have also relied on a wide range of administrative sources, statistics and reference works,[3] as well as memoirs.[4] This extensive source base enabled them more accurately to track the development of Soviet mechanisms for recognizing foreign qualifications.

Among foreign authors, the work of the prominent Dutch specialist K. Kouwernaar during the 1970's and 1980's[5] in the best practices of European academic mobility and recog-

[1] S.A. Kovalenko, *Mezhdunarodnyy opyt priznaniya obrazovaniya i kvalifikatsiy v stranakh Yevropeyskogo regiona i Rossiyskoy Federatsii v 1960–2015 gg.* (Moscow: RUDN Publ., 2018).

[2] A.G. Smirnov, "Vyssheye obrazovaniye v Yevrope," *Yunesko Sepes* 15, no. 2 (1990): 52.

[3] A.I. Bogomolov, *Comparability of engineering courses and degrees. A methodological study* (Paris: The Unesco Press, 1974).

[4] V.A. Belov, *Izbrannyye trudy* (Moscow: RUDN Publ., 2014), 33.

[5] K. Kouwernaar, "Recognition instruments in Europe," *Higher Education in Europe* 19, no. 2 (1994): 7–26.

nition of qualifications, was particularly valuable,[6] as were the publications of Sjur Bergan, the head of the Council of Europe's Department of Research and Higher education.[7]

Russian scholars of education have also studied the question, but with a focus on their own country's system. For example, beginning in 1972, there have been groups of specialists at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow (now the People's Friendship University of Russia). Among the leading experts, special mention should be made of Professor V.M. Filippov,[8] who directly participated in the development of the Lisbon Convention, while throughout his career Associate Professor G. Tkach,[9] has helped develop at least half of the current agreements on the mutual recognition of diplomas and qualifications between Russia and other countries. At the same time, Professor V.N. Chistokhvalov made an important contribution to Russian cooperation with members of the European Union, including the Bologna process,[10] and Associate Professor G.A. Lukichev[11] has written numerous publications about the international aspects of recognition. As for Russian participation in the Bologna process and the WTO, and their potential impact on the country's higher education system, mention should be made of the work Professor V.S. Senashenko.[12] Meanwhile, Professor V.V. Nasonkin has paid much attention to international educational law and the impact of globalization on the educational policy of EU countries.[13]

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[6] The Dutch organisation for internationalization in education, https://www.nuffic.nl/en.

[7] Sjur Bergan, *Recognition issues in the Bologna Process* (Brussels: Consul of Europe, 2003); Sjur Bergan, Andreys Rauhvargers, *Recognition in the Bologna Process: policy development and the road to good practice* (Brussels: Consul of Europe, 2006); Sjur Bergan, *Not by bread alone* (Brussels: Consul of Europe, 2011); Sjur Bergan, Carita Blomqvist, *The Lisbon Recognition Convention at 15: making fair recognition a reality* (Brussels: Consul of Europe, 2014).

[8] V.M. Filippov, *Reformy obrazovaniya: Analiticheskiy obzor* (Moscow: Tsentr sravnitel'noy obrazovatel'noy politiki Publ., 2003); V. M. Filippov, *Modernizatsiya rossiyskogo obrazovaniya* (Moscow: Prosveshcheniye Publ., 2003).

[9] G.F. Tkach, V.N Chistokhvalov, "The introduction of a single supplement to the diploma in order to recognize the qualifications of Russian universities abroad," *Civil Aviation High Technologies*, no. 102 (2006): 164–167; G.F. Tkach, "O nekotorykh osobennostiakh sovremennogo etapa mezhdunarodnogo obrazovatel'nogo sotrudnichestva," in *Innovatsionnoe razvitie obshchestva: usloviia, protivorechiia, prioritety* (Moscow: MU im. S.Yu. Vitte Publ., 2004), 207–212; G.F. Tkach, "Reforma vysshego obrazovaniia Frantsii," in *Partnerstvo Frantsii i Rossiia: Internationalizatsiia obrazovaniia, nauki, ekonomiki*. Moscow: RANKhGS Publ., 2015), 24–38; G.F. Tkach, V.S. Sevashenko, "Bologna Process: Review of the evolution of priorities and subtotals," *Higher education in Russia*, no. 7 (2015): 119–130.

[10] V.N. Chistokhvalov, *Osobennosti modernizatsii rossiikogo i evropeiskogo vysshego obrazovaniia v 1991–2005 godakh: Istoriko-sravnitel'no analiz* (Moscow: RUDN Publ., 2010); V.N. Chistokhvalov, *Formirovania i realizatsiia intgegratsionnykh obrazovatel'nykh protsessov v Rossiiskoi Federatsii i v Evropeiskom Soiuze v 1991–2005 godakh: Sravnitel'nyi analiz, opyt, problem i perspektivy* (Moscow: RUDN Publ., 2010).

[11] G.A. Lukichev, "Bologna Process: Movement towards the creation of a new era of education," *RUDN Journal of Informatization in Education*, no. 1/2 (2005): 16–23; G.A. Lukichev, "O priznanii kvalifikatsiy vysshego obrazovaniya v Yevropeyskom regione. Znacheniye Lissabonskoy konventsii o priznanii dlya mezhdunarodnoy integratsii v sfere obrazovaniya," in *Znacheniye Lissabonskoy konventsii o priznanii dlya mezhdunarodnoy integratsii v sfere obrazovaniya* (Moscow: RUDN Publ., 2005), 90–104; G.A. Lukichev, V.I. Skorobogatov, "Rossiiskaia kvalifikatsiia 'spetsialist' v izmereniiakh evropeiskogo prostranstva vysshego obrazovaniia," in *Sbornik tezisov mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii "Praktika priznaniia, sblizhaia kontinenty* (Moscow: RUDN Publ., 2006), 24–30.

[12] V.S. Senashenko, G.F. Tkach, "On the trends in the formation of Russian higher education," *Higher Education in Russia*, no. 10 (2014): 29–42; V.S. Senashenko, G.F. Tkach, "About Higher Academic and Professional Education," *Higher Education in Russia*, no. 4 (2012): 19–24; V.S. Senashenko, G.F. Tkach, "On the trends in the formation of Russian higher education," *Economics of Education*, no. 2 (2014): 95–98.

[13] V.V. Nasonkin, G.F. Tkach, "General characteristics of educational systems of foreign legislation at the present stage," *Civil Aviation High Technologies*, no. 116 (2007): 13–19; V.V. Nasonkin, *Natsional'noye i regional'noye izmereniye gosudarstvennoy obrazovatel'noy politiki v kontekste globalizatsii : na primere YES* (St. Petersburg: Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy pedagogicheskiy institut imeni A.I. Gertsena Publ., 2015).

Elsewhere in the Russian capital, a group of experts led by N.I. Zverev at the Institute of International Education of Moscow State University, has examined recognition issues as well,[14] and M.N. Zhitnikova paid particular attention to the organization and implementation of foreign qualifications in the Russian Federation, thereby making a significant contribution to the creation of the domestic recognition system.[15] While at the Institute of International Educational Programs of St. Petersburg State Technical University, E.G. Shevchenko, its head for many years, also carried out much work on the topic.[16]

Stage One

Bilateral agreements on the mutual recognition of educational qualifications only became relevant in the mid-1960s, when large numbers of foreign graduates of Soviet higher educational institutions returned home or went to other countries. Already in 1966, the USSR signed such an accord with Egypt and Syria. Over the following decade there were 19 more pacts with other countries in the developing world, and another 15 during the 1980s. In all, by the 1990s there were a total of 52 treaties, affecting foreign students from 160 countries.[17]

To simplify the procedure, in 1972 representatives of nine states – Bulgaria, Hungary, Vietnam, German Democratic Republic, Cuba, Mongolia, Poland, the USSR and Czechoslovakia – signed the "Convention on the Mutual Recognition of Equivalent Graduation Certification of Secondary, Secondary Special and Higher Educational Institutions, as Well as Documents on Conferring Academic Degrees and Titles."[18]

Also known as the Prague Convention, this agreement established rules for the mutual recognition of relevant qualifications that took into account both the specifics of national education systems and academic training in general.[19] A unique development in such multilateral agreements, the convention was a good example of international contractual legal practice, and became possible due to the similarity of education systems among its signatories, as well as higher education in these countries. Although subsequent developments among its members limited its practical application, none of them officially renounced the Prague Convention.

With regard to the West, cooperation in education and vocational training between the USSR and Finland was particularly extensive. Thus, from the 1960s, more Finnish students studied in the Soviet Union than from all other Western countries combined, and the two countries concluded an agreement on the mutual recognition of educational degrees and diplomas in 1979.[20]

[14] N.I. Zverev, M.N. Zhitnikova, G.F. Tkach, "Some practical aspects of the implementation of recognition and establishment of equivalence of foreign qualifications," *Civil Aviation High Technologies*, no. 116 (2007): 26–35; N.I. Zverev, M.N. Zhitnikova, G.F. Tkach, "On the classification parameters of foreign documents on education, taking into account the specifics of their belonging to national education systems," *Civil Aviation High Technologies*, no. 128 (2008): 32–42.

[15] M.N. Zhitnikova, M.N. Zverev, G.F. Tkach, "Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan: Educational Programs and Assigned Qualifications," *Civil Aviation High Technologies*, no. 128 (2008): 48–58.

[16] *Sbornik dokumentov, kasaiushchikhsia mezhdunarodnykh aktov vysshego obrazovaniia* St. Petersburg: ORAKUL Publ., 2000); E.G. Shevchenko, "Gotovimsia k detsentralizatsii rossiiskogo sistemy priznaniia inostrannykh dokumentov ob obrazovanii," in *Praktika priznaniia, sblizhaia kontinenty: Sbornik tezisov mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii* (Moscow: RUDN Publ., 2016), 74–76.

[17] A.G. Smirnov, "Vysshee obrazovaniie v Evrope," *UNESCO Sepes* 15, no. 2 (1990): 55.

[18] D. Bilibin, "Obrazovanie v edinom i vzaimosviazannom mire," *Inkorvuz*, no. 2 (1992): 29.

[19] Minsterstvo obrazovaniia i nauki Rossiiskoi Federatsii, "Federal'noe infomatsionno-analisticheskaia Sistema 'Rossiiskoe obrazovanie dlia inostrannykh grazhdan," http://www.russia.edu.ru/information/legal/law/inter/1972/

[20] Protokol mezhdu Pravitel'stvom Soiuza Sovietskikh Sotisalisticheskikh Respublik i Pravitel'stvom Finliandskoi Respubliki o vzaimonom prizaniia ravnotsennosti dokumentov o vysshem obrazovanii, uchebnye

In 1972, a research laboratory to study foreign education and evaluate its equivalency in certification with Soviet standards was established at Patrice Lumumba University. The laboratory drafted all draft bilateral agreements on equivalence, with organizational and technological support from the Ministries of Higher Education, Justice, and Foreign Affairs of the USSR. A year later, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education, the Scientific Research Institute of Higher School Problems was founded. The new institution had ten departments devoted to higher education, along with those that specialized in determining the equivalency of degrees and diplomas internationally.

To ease foreign recognition of Soviet degrees in higher education, the Ministry of Higher Education enlisted the institute's specialists, such as A.P. Akat'ev, A.I. Galagan, V.N. Timofeeva, G. F. Tkach, A.G. Smirnov, and K.N. Tseikovich. As the only experts in the matter, their work was indispensable for expanding academic mobility.

The development of relevant cooperation agreements intensified with the Final Act at the Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE) in Europe on August 1, 1975, in Helsinki,[21] which also provided for increasing educational exchanges between the USSR and other European countries. The new treaties implemented the mutual study of education systems, including the technologies for assessing qualifications and knowledge, in order to draft documents on mutual recognition and equivalency of academic qualifications.

Already in September 1975, the Minister of Higher and Secondary Special Education issued the corresponding order,[22] which regulated the admission of foreign students holding a Bachelor's degree in their home country's institution into Soviet universities. Moreover, with the examination committee's consent, a Master of Science degree could also be recognized.

The Soviet Union also began talks with a number of West European countries as well as the USA and Canada on mutual recognition of degrees in higher education, but these were disrupted in the early 1980s due to the war in Afghanistan.[23]At the same time, efforts to recognize foreign diplomas in the framework of UNESCO were also stepped up.

In 1979, the Soviet Union signed the Convention on the Recognition of Educational Courses, Higher Education Diplomas and Degrees in Europe, which it ratified three years later. However, there were important differences in the agreement's implementation. Thus, most European countries set up offices to provide information about the equivalency of foreign degrees, which joined to form the European Network of Information Centers (ENIC).[24] At the same time, they organized the Regional Committee to monitor the European Convention's implementation. However, there were no corresponding changes in the USSR. Moreover, its representatives were not invited to participate neither in ENIC's deliberations, nor those of the Regional Committee, which hampered academic mobility.

Stage Two

When the Regional Convention on the recognition of Educational Courses, Higher Education Diplomas and Degrees in the States of Asia and the Pacific was signed in 1983, the Soviet delegation did not entirely concur with the document. In particular, it disagreed

stepenei, a takzhe dokumentov, daiushchikh pravo postupleniie v vyshhie uchebnye zavedeniia Moskva, 7 December 1917," http:// mn.russia.edu.ru/information/legal/law/inter/soglash/1540/

[21] Organizatsiia po bezopasnosti i sotrudnichestvu v Evropy (OBSE), https://www.osce.org/ru/mc/39505?download=true

[22] "Ob utverzhdenii polozheniia ob obuchenii v vysshikh uchenykh zavedaniiakh SSSR inostrannykh grazhdan, imeiushchikh obrazovania na urovne bakalavra nauk/iskusstv: Prikaz Ministerstvo vysshego i srednego spetsial'nogo obrazovaniia SSSR No. 840," in *Sbornik dokumentov po voprosam priema, obucheniia i material'nogo obespechaniia inostrannykh grazhdan, obuchaiushchikhsia v SSSR* (Moscow: RUDN, 1983), 10–26.

[23] Smirnov, *Vysshee obrazovaniie v Evrope*, 56.

[24] Sjur Bergan, *Not by bread alone* (Brussels: Consul of Europe, 2011).

with section 2b of paragraph 1, which defined "higher education" as any education, training or research preceded by secondary schooling,[25] since it understood the term very differently. While most countries had two- or three level systems, higher education in the USSR consisted of one level – a contradiction that could not be resolved, even within the framework of UNESCO.

UNESCO did promote discussion among experts from different countries on such topics as the main directions, forms and mechanisms for developing academic mobility, as well recognition of educational certification. This resulted in six regional UNESCO conventions to promote international academic cooperation.

In 1986, a group of employees of the Scientific Research Institute of Higher School went to Patrice Lumumba University to set up the Scientific and Information Center for Foreign Education, supervised by A. G. Smirnov. Three years later, in 1989, the Committee on Equivalency was established within the framework of State Education of the USSR (Gosobrazovaniia SSSR), which included experts, the heads of the leading higher educational institutions of the country, as well as relevant government officials, to develop principles for comparing educational programs in foreign and Soviet universities, academic degrees and ranks, organizing mechanisms for interstate treates, as well as cooperation agreements with foreign organizations.

The Scientific and Information Center for Foreign Education at the Patrice Lumumba University acted as the working secretariat of the Committee on Equivalency, and was tasked with providing relevant information and consulting on academic mobility, as well as recognition of educational qualifications. By that time, similar units had already been opened in the leading European countries. The center produced reports and scholarly publications on comparative educational policy.[26] At the same time, it also helped to organize UNESCO seminars on policy and reforms in higher education, which were hosted by Patrice Lumumba University in 1989.

The Center's staff was usually invited to participate in the work of the Soviet commission for admitting foreign citizens to study in the USSR. Among the many, multifaceted accomplishments of the Center's activities was the supplement to Soviet diplomas of higher education, which it developed in 1990 in accordance with the standards of the UNESCO European Center for Higher Education.

Stage Three

The imbalance in international academic mobility became acute during the second half of the 1980s and the early 1990s. Thus, whereas in 1990 120,000 foreigners came to the USSR for post-secondary study, only about 400 Soviet citizens studied abroad. Nevertheless, the situation did improve during Perestroika, when groups of students and interns from the USSR were sent to German, French and American educational institutions.[27] Meanwhile, the pace of international exchange programs for teachers, scholars and students increased significantly. At the same time, the Soviet Union's higher education system faced new challenges. Thus, in 1988, UNESCO's International Bureau of Education[28]

[25] "Vystupleniye g-na Nikolaya Sofinskogo, zamestitelya Ministra vysshego i srednego spetsial'nogo obrazovaniya SSSR, glavy delegatsii SSSR," in *Mezhdunarodnaya konferentsiya gosudarstv dlya prinyatiya Regional'noy konventsii o priznanii uchebnykh kursov, diplomov o vysshem obrazovanii v gosudarstvakh Azii i Tikhogo okeana. Zaklyuchitel'nyy doklad* (Paris: [S.n.], 1984), 3.

[26] N.M. Timofeeva, G.F. Tkach, O.P. Pobokova, A.A. Samsonova, A.M. Vershinina, O.L. Zakharova, *Systemy vysshego obrazovaniia razvivaiushchikh stran: Katalog* (Moscow: UDN Publ., 1986); O.L. Zakharova, I.V. Muraveva, A.B. Osanov, A.G. Smirnov, N.G. Bakradze, N.M. Timofeev, G.F. Tkach. *Systemy vysshego obrazovaniia stran Zapada: Spavochnik* (Moscow: UDN Publ., 1991).

[27] "Changing flows in international student mobility," https://www.nuffic.nl

[28] "International Bureau of Education," http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/

advised against recognizing Patrice Lumuba University's master's degrees on the ground that there were no bachelor's programs in the Soviet Union.[29] The university responded with an experimental two-level system of education. Already in 1992, Professor V.M. Filippov, the Dean of its Faculty of Physical, Mathematical and Natural Sciences, began to award bachelor's degrees to students who had successfully completed the new program. This experiment began 22 years before the Russian Federation's law introducing a two-level system of education went into effect.

In 1987, it became clear that an international organization of foreign graduates of Soviet higher educational institutions to cooperate of other national associations was needed to protect their rights, improve their qualifications, help continue their education, and recognize their diplomas. Two years later, a founding conference set up the International Corporation of Graduates of Soviet Educational Institutions (Inkorvuz), adopted its Charter, and prepared a request for its registration in the USSR.[30]

Delegates from 33 countries certified the founding documents, while the corporation's council included members of the national associations of the USSR, Kuwait, India, Peru, Czechoslovakia, Finland and Tanzania. Among the Soviet institutions of higher education that sent representatives to its constituent assembly were Patrice Lumumba University, Kiev State University, Kiev Polytechnic Institute and Volgograd Pedagogical Institute. Inkorvuz's council elected Professor Devendra Kaushik of Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi as its first chairman, as well as Mikhail N. Kuznetsov, a lecturer at the Peoples' Friendship University, to be its director general.

In May 1990, the Council of Ministers certified the status the International Corporation of Graduates of Soviet Educational Institutions as an international non-governmental organization, defining its activities as

> ...assisting foreign graduates of Soviet higher educational institutions to improve their professional qualifications and retraining in educational, research institutions, to promote international scientific, technical and humanitarian cooperation ... in science, technology, medicine, education, culture, tourism and in other areas.[31]

According to Soviet law, both Inkorvuz and its institutions were exempted from all taxes, duties or fees, which greatly assisted its activities.

The USSR's collapse in 1991 greatly complicated the recognition of the diplomas of foreign graduates of Soviet higher educational institutions just as academic exchanges between its former republics and other countries were intensifying. This made the Committee on Equivalency's work even more important in such tasks as preparing draft treaties and other international agreements, publishing relevant information, comparing foreign education systems, as well as participating in international conferences.[32]

Among other, its powers were to issue certificates of educational equivalency to graduates of the Soviet higher educational institutions moving abroad were expanded. In addition, the committee was authorized to compile a list of higher educational institutions abroad whose degrees had been recognized among their Soviet equivalents.[33] Meanwhile, to respond to the please of citizens of Eastern European countries who had graduated from Soviet universities and institutes, as well as citizens from the former Soviet Union

[29] V. Filippov, "Predlagaia eksperiment," *Korporativnaia kul'tura*, http://www.c-culture.ru/read/article/163956

[30] "Biulletin 'Inkovruz,'" *Inkovruz: Dolumenty i fakty*, no. 1 (1992): 18.

[31] "Postanovlenie Soveta Ministrov SSSR ot 17 maia 1990," no. 483, http://docs.cntd.ru/document/901770752

[32] V.S. Senashenko, G.F. Tkach, "O tendentsiiakh reformirovaniia rossiiskoi vysshei shkoly," *Economics of Education*, no. 2 (2014): 95–98.

[33] "O priznanii v SSSR dokumentov o vysshem obrazovanii, poluchennykh sovetskimi grazhdanami v uchebnykh zavedeniia zarubezhnykh stran: Postanovlenie Soveta Ministrov SSSR ot 4 sentiabria 1990 g., http://docs.cntd.ru/document/9006311

who were going abroad, the committee developed certificates to confirm their level of education.

The committee's subsequent abolition in the aftermath of the USSR's collapse further aggravated the need for its work, and institutions, primarily non-governmental organizations, jumped in to fill the gap. One important example was the "International Corporation of Soviet Educational Institution Graduates," which created a "Commission of Equivalence" of prominent specialists to recognize the equivalency of Soviet and foreign degrees. Attended by representatives of the educational authorities of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, the commission first met in Spring 1992.[34]

Although it issued official certificates confirming the equivalency of a diplomat, which were printed by Goznak, the Russian press for currency and other government certificates, they were advisory and did not guarantee official recognition abroad.

The 1990s saw the broad acceptance of education as a human right. At the same time, the decade rising academic mobility between members of the Commonwealth of Independent States and other countries. Thus, recognizing educational qualifications across international borders enabled men and women to make better use of their skills abroad. This also led to scholarly interest in studying the criteria for comparing the academic degrees and diplomas of countries that developed educational, scientific and cultural contacts.[35]

Headed by Professor D.P. Bilibin of the Peoples' Friendship University, the commission enabled specialists to rely the experience in recognizing the equivalency of higher education certificates of the USSR, UN, UNESCO, CEPES, IAU, WHO, ICAO, and MAPRYAL, as well as of state and non-state education systems throughout the world. The Commission on Equivalency was abolished when Inkorvuz was shut down on January 1, 2002.

Despite UNESCO's intensive efforts, European regional organizations, and individual countries, the challenge of recognizing degrees and diplomas internationally has persisted for decades. This is the result both of the ambiguous understanding of certain levels of education in different countries, and the labor market's demand for new types of training and their corresponding diplomas, which often do not fit into traditional categories. Moreover, sidestepping the requirements for equivalency and simply recognizing foreign certificates do not necessarily solve the problem.

Indeed, countries continue to struggle with agreeing about the validity of foreign degrees. This problem was especially acute in the 1990s, when numerous attempts were made to establish accurate definitions of diplomas issued by educational institutions of different states according to similar international standards. To meet the challenge, the Council of Europe organized the NEED-GROUP, a temporary unit of the Higher Education Section of the Council of Europe, which began to publish relevant information.

Already in early 1993, the Council of Europe issued a request to the State Committee for Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation to provide descriptions of diplomas and degrees issued by Russian institutions of higher education. This work was entrusted to the Research and Information Center for Foreign Education of the Peoples' Friendship University, which acts as the Russian Information Center for Recognition and Academic Mobility, with the assistance of the State Education Committee.[36]

This work resulted in descriptions of the main diplomas and academic degrees conferred by Russia's higher educational institutions. Together with the corresponding ad-

[34] "Biulletin 'Inkovruz," *Inkovruz: Dolumenty i fakty*, no. 1 (1992): 21.

[35] V.M. Filippov, "Internationalization of higher education: major trends, challenges and prospects," *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 15, no. 3 (2015): 203–212.

[36] "Programma 'Universitety Rossii," *Opisaniia diplomov i stepenei vysshikh uchenykh zavedenii Rossiiskpoi Federatsiia po standartam Soveta Evropa*, no. 2 (1994): 60.

mission requirements, these descriptions were provided in accordance with the Council of Europe's standards, in both Russian and English, to the council's information bank. Accessible to all, these details are meant to promote academic mobility in Russia.[37]

By the same token, the Council of Europe's experts familiarized themselves with the structure of Russian higher education, its degrees and diplomas, the requirements for admission, as well as with details about relevant reforms. They supported all of the important provisions and formulations for the Researcher's diploma, as well as the Master's, Candidate's, and Doctor of Science degrees.

As for the Russian Bachelor's degree, it was classified as an "intermediate" degree (diploma), which, as a rule, are issued after two or three years of study in the West. The experts argued that a full secondary education in Russia took 11 years, while it required at least 12 years in other European countries. As a result, Russia's four-year bachelor's program was inferior to those of Western universities. Furthermore, although holders of a bachelor's degree in the West can proceed directly to doctoral programs, Russian graduates must first obtain a master's degree. As a result, the Council of Europe did not consider that a bachelor's degree in the Russian Federation met its standards.

Conclusion

As the number of foreign students attending Soviet institutions of higher education rose during the postwar years, the need to agree on the equivalency of their academic degrees became urgent. Experts from research centers and higher educational institutions were invited to draft documents, along with official representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and of Higher Education of the USSR. In this regard, bilateral agreements on equivalency and recognition of educational certificates were updated again.

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