1. The turning points of the development of higher education in Russia at the end of 20th – the beginning of 21st century

There have been two turning points in the development of Russian higher education system for the past 15 years that have had a direct impact on the IR education. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of Russia as an independent state are considered to be the first one. This period is characterized by the overthrow of the Marxist-Leninist ideology being the only appropriate basis for carrying out a research and providing training. The significant effect of those changes was particularly noticeable in social and political spheres. Moreover, the disintegration of the Soviet Union has brought about the severance of professional ties in the domain of science and education in the Post-Soviet space as well as in Russia. Financial problems of universities and research institutes, the undermined professional prestige of research workers and other misfortunes have caused a real exodus of expert personnel. A minute improvement was recorded in the middle 1990s when Russian universities and research centers (though not all of them) adjusted to the realities of market-oriented economy with tuition fees and grants being made an income source. The inter-university cooperation within Russia and professional contacts between Russian and foreign universities intensified, Moscow, St.Petersburg and, what is more important, Russian regions apart from these centers being involved in this process.

The second turning point is closely connected to Russia’s decision to join the Bologna process that implies the integration of the higher education systems of European countries. Russian higher education is currently passing through this period.

It is worth mentioning that the education system integration in Europe is gaining momentum at a remarkably quick pace: while nowadays the EU established 60 years ago encompasses just 25 member-states, the Bologna process launched in the very late 1990s involves 40 European countries. And this progress has been made notwithstanding the language bar, national education system peculiarities that have been built up for centuries and so on and so forth. What is the reason of this high-profile performance?

In the latter half of the 20th century there were at least two periods of Europe lagging behind the other regions. There was a certain technological retardation in European countries as compared with
the US and Japan. The ensuing consequences of this setback revealed themselves in the succeeding
decade. Consequently, falling behind in the promotion of plastic cards and credit card services as well
as the development of cellular communications and the expansion of the Internet Europe proceeded
more slowly than, for example, the USA. It should be noted that as far as the large-scale application of
several technological innovations is concerned, in the early 1990s developed European states were
lagging behind such countries as the Republic of South Africa (leave alone the USA and Japan) where
in the very 1990s the ATM (automatic teller machines) system, the cellular network and the national
computer network ‘Beltel’ that made the electronic transmission of payments for public services
possible expanded all through the country.

The other matter of concern for European countries was their waning global leadership in
providing education services in 1990s. Since the early 1990s European students studying in the USA
have over outnumbered American students receiving education in Europe¹. The backwardness of the
European education did not have only economic implications but physiological either. Europe that had
great cultural legacy with higher education being its integral part now was lagging behind in the very
field.

The recognition of these drawbacks forced European nations to get down to higher education
reform. Bearing this in mind they turned to their long-standing historical traditions of the integration in
the field of education that goes back to the mediaeval universities.

Thus, 1999 year was marked by the signature of the Bologna declaration that has given its name
to the whole process of the European education integration. The main aims of the declaration can be
reduced to the following: adopting a system essentially based on two main cycles (the Bachelor and
Master degrees); establishing a system of credits – a common system of appropriate assessment of the
learning outcomes (this refers to all educational components of a study programme and reflects the
quantity of work each component requires to achieve) in all states that are parties to the declaration;
creating an independent quality assurance system based not on the spent class hours, but on the
knowledge and skills acquired; promoting mobility of students and teachers; raising the employability
of graduates; building up the attractiveness of the European education.

Russia entered the Bologna process rather late - in 2003 when the majority of the participants
had already been involved in the European education integration. The Bologna process in Russia (like
in the others countries before) produced so-called bologna-optimists as well as bologna-pessimists. In
Russia the education integration within the framework of the Bologna declaration has come in the
forefront of the heated debates with rival parties presenting arguments for and against, including those
concerning the peculiarities of the firmly established traditions of Russian education. However, the

¹ Bolonskiy protsess: narastayushaya dinamika i mnogoobrazie / Dokumenty mezhdunarodnikh forumov i mneniya
formally proclaimed aim of entering the common European education space impels universities to make certain changes in order to meet the requirements of the Bologna process.

Thus, the development of IR higher education has also been dominated by these significant alterations. At the same time it has its own distinctive features that are an after-effect of the special status of IR education in the Soviet period: only a small group of people representing the Soviet elite worked in this field.

2. IR education in the USSR

The IR education system in the Soviet Union began to take shape at the end of the World War II. This process was initiated for merely utilitarian purposes: having achieved victory in the World War II the USSR substantially increased its diplomatic activity not only on bilateral as well as on regional levels, but also within the framework of the United Nations and other international organizations where the Soviet Union participated as a major actor. This rapid expansion of the diplomatic intercourse entailed an acute need for well trained and accomplished Soviet diplomatic corps. It also brought to the fore the necessity of creating centers aimed at carrying out research and analysis of the post-War foreign affairs.

1943 year was marked by the foundation of a Faculty of International Relations at Moscow State University. A year later this faculty was transformed into a separate institute under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO-university). It was aimed at preparing personnel for various Soviet institutions and organizations (e.g. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, the institutes of the Academy of Sciences, Soviet mass media and other institutions). Apart from MGIMO there had already been established the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was founded in 1934 in order to provide training of those who already had a diploma (regardless specialization, e.g. on engineering) and certain practical experience in politics which in that time could be acquired when working in the Soviets or in the Communist party apparatus. MGIMO, on the contrary, served to train raw recruits.

Unlike the majority of states where the IR studies were carried out within the framework of the activity of political science faculties, in the USSR the IR education from its very beginning was dominated by a historical approach. Until the late 1980s for reasons of the official ideology the political science has been considered neither a subject of the regular curriculum nor an independent discipline. Although the Soviet Association for Political Sciences kept on working, its activity was reduced to maintaining contacts between the heads of academic institutions and their foreign counterparts.

In the late 1960s Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnie otnosheniya made a tenuous attempt to depart from the perception of the IR studies as a historical discipline. Several issues of this scientific review were dedicated to the discussion concerning the characteristics of the international relations.
The debates resulted in the adoption of the interdisciplinary approach (that embraced history as well as economics and law) to the world politics. However, in the USSR the IR studies, in substance, were regarded as a multidisciplinary field, not as an inter-disciplinary one. There was a sharp distinction made between these disciplines. Studying history was of top priority in the education process with economics and law being compulsory subjects of the curriculum.

The second peculiarity of the IR studies and education in the Soviet Union was the predominance of country and regional studies based on a historical approach and lack of the analysis of international problems as such. The manifestation of this peculiarity could be easily seen in the names of the subjects studied (the history of the USA, the history of African states, the history of Latin American countries, etc.) and with few exceptions (e.g. the Institute of World Economy and International Relations) in the specialization of the institutes of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (the Institute for the USA and Canadian Studies, the Institute of Africa, the Institute of Latin America, etc.). It was country and regional studies that were at the core of the analysis of the key problems of the international relations. The academic curriculum was also based on this principle.

The third peculiarity of the IR education in the Soviet era refers to the concentration of education and research institutions in Moscow and the participation of a limited number of people in this field of science. There were no centers of the IR studies and/or education in the other cities in the USSR (except for a small research group at Kiev State University). Moreover, the Institute of Asian and African studies at Moscow State University trained Orientalists with primary attention being paid to social and economic or historical and philological characteristics of the countries (the curriculum depended on the specialization of a student).

The other distinctive feature of the IR education in the Soviet Union concerns the divorcement of the educational process from the IR studies (broadly speaking it was a drawback of all fields of science in the USSR, bar none). The research was primarily carried out in the institutes of the Soviet Academy of Sciences; however, its staff members generally were not engaged in teaching. There was also a gap between teaching process and diplomatic practice that was more or less bridged by designating experienced officers of state to MGIMO and the Diplomatic Academy. However, the prestige of teaching was rather low in the Soviet Union, therefore it was usually officers of retirement age who applied as a teacher.

The last peculiarity of the IR education and studies in the Soviet Union was its common methodological basis. It is generally assumed that Marxism served as the basis of teaching and research methodology. However, the mechanism was more complicated: despite the predominance of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, the IR studies tended towards a symbiosis of Marxism-Leninism and Neorealism. The symbiosis of these two paradigms was self-contradictory: on the one hand, national

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interests were central to the analysis, on the other hand, the proletarian internationalism was also of top priority. This collision of principles revealed itself in the international practice as well as in the IR studies and education in the Soviet period. At the same time, as the Soviet Union was strengthening its positions as a superpower, the Neorealist approach in the IR studies was gaining ground with Marxism-Leninism becoming a mere declamation.  


Disintegration of the Soviet Union and the changes following it had a direct impact on the IR studies and education in this field. First of all, this sphere democratized and became accessible at the regional level. The year 1994 the Faculty of the international relations opened at the University of Saint-Petersburg. Now there are cognate faculties and departments in the universities and awarding institutions of Nizhniy Novgorod, Kazan, Yekaterinburg, Vladivostok, Irkutsk, Tomsk, Ryazan, Ivanovo and other cities. Totally, there are more than 40 universities in different Russian cities that offer various levels of educational programmes in the IR and approximately the same number of universities have programmes in the regional studies. Only in Moscow, apart from MGIMO, the international relations are taught at the Faculty of World Politics at the Institute for the USA and Canadian Studies, at the Faculty of World Politics established in 2003 at Moscow State University, at the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia and at some others awarding institutions.  

MGIMO remains to be the main centre of the IR teaching in Russia and is heading the Association of Russian Universities in which the international relations are taught (to certain extent, this Association may be regarded as the analogue of APSIA). MGIMO offers the IR training at all levels – a bachelor degree (4 years), a specialist degree (5 years), a master degree (6 years) and a Ph. D. degree. Compared to other universities MGIMO has the largest number of students (about 4000 students) who specialize in different fields of the IR. MGIMO also took the leading role in creation of the Russian International Studies Association (RISA) which was established in December 1999. Dramatic changes took place in the realm of the IR studies that influenced education as well. First and foremost, the volume of issues studied increased substantially. It went beyond the analysis of the foreign policy of certain states and regions and encompassed almost all aspects of the modern IR. New magazines devoted to the IR including Mezhdunarodnye protsessy, Kosmopolis and others dealing with scientific and scientifically applied issues appeared. A circle of people involved in the IR analysis and its teaching considerably widened both as to their number and to the location of the research and  

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education centers. Independent analytical centers were founded as well. Russia’s regions began to take an active role in the international arena and thus became a subject of interest for the IR specialists.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s political science in Russia was in the process of becoming a scientific discipline and a part of academic curriculum. Within this period scientific magazines appeared, the Russian Association of Political Sciences was formed, conferences were held and political science became a university discipline.

Relations between political science and the IR studies in all countries have never been smooth. Historically both subjects were to a great extent isolated from each other since from the very beginning they were pointed either at the study of a state as such (political science) or at the interstate cooperation (IR). However, for quite a long time in European and American universities the international relations as a rule have been studied at the faculties of political science. Such “cohabitation” at the same faculties has paid off: the distinction between two disciplines became blurred.

After 1991 many universities in Russia began teaching international relations and historical faculties served as a basis, while political science usually developed within philosophical faculties. It is worth adding that Russian political science to a great extent is aimed at analyzing electoral behavior in Russia and this field does not have much in common with the IR studies. Meanwhile it would not be right to contend that there are insurmountable obstacles between political science and the international relations in Russia. Both political scientists and specialists in the international relations hold heated discussions on certain issues. In particular, in 2004 a discussion devoted to world politics took place on the pages of Mezhdunarodnye protsessy and Polis magazines. Nevertheless the IR studies and political science in Russia are considerably isolated from each other.

One of the major factors limiting a dialogue between political science and the IR studies in Russia is a distinct etatism and rather constricted theoretical basis of both the IR studies and political science that to a great extent is a result of preceding development of the disciplines. The symbiosis of Marxist-Leninist ideology and realism inherent for the Soviet IR studies has fully yielded to neorealism which has evidently become a dominating theoretical trend of the IR studies in Russia, and national interests as a categorical concept have become a central one. A national interest is a key notion for geopolitics as well. The geopolitical approach is in great request in Russia: a vast number of textbooks on geopolitics are published; it is included into the curriculum of almost all universities where the IR

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studies are taught. As a result both of these theoretical approaches have gone beyond academic circles. As Mr. A.Sergunin pointed out, representatives of entirely different political parties and movements such as “Yabloko”, “Dukhovnoe nasledie”, LDPR (headed by Mr. V.Zhirinovsky) share realistic and geopolitical views. In this respect an interview given by Mr. A.G.Arbatov, former deputy of long standing in the State Duma nominated by democratically oriented party “Yabloko”, to the Vestnik magazine serves an illustrative example. When asked how he could estimate the role of non-state actors that exist in modern world many of which are very influential, Mr. Arbatov underlines: “A new polar system of the international relations can not be reduced to several nation-states of the Westphalian world, it is a completely different structure based on both the political and economic integration of the states. It is a super-state structure opposed by non-state trans-border organizations. Nowadays there are even the organizations of antiglobalists and international terrorists in existence… You may remember that non-state participants of the international relations (INGOs) have always been a product of the civil society. Terrorist organizations were the off-springs of these very INGOs”.

Thus as far as political theory is concerned, the Russian political science which gained impetus only in the last 10-15 years remains within the rigid limits of Weber’s notions. These notions as well as the IR specialists’ conceptualization of the world in terms of the classical Westphalian system lead to creating a negative perception of all non-state actors and to countering them against a state. As a result a corresponding research agenda is being settled: issues concerning a polar world, interstate cooperation, national security, etc. are brought in the forefront of the IR studies. At the same time issues referring to the international political economy, theory of the international relations, development of the international institutions and regimes, etc. recede into the background not only of a scientific interest but of an educational process as well.

One of the practical steps on the way towards bridging the gap between the Russian political science and the IR studies (the educational field included) as well as towards enhancing theoretical background of both disciplines and issues of analysis may be taken in the very sphere of education as Russia’s accession to the Bologna process will lead, among other things, to an increased role of the political science studies in the education of those studying the international relations in Russia.

4. The Consequences of the Bologna process development in the realm of International Relations

Russia like other European states that have signed the Bologna Declaration has initiated a reform of higher education in accordance with the standards set in this document. It comes as a surprise that while educationalists, university management, partially lawyers and economists discuss the

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Bologna Process from the professional viewpoints political scientists and the IR specialists remain silent, though the integration of higher education in Europe may be significant in its social and economic consequences. They are very likely to have an impact not only on European political development.

The development of the Bologna process, for instance, may lead to unexpected outcomes in the interstate relations. Thus, Russia and Latvia are the states which participate in the Bologna process: Latvia – from the very beginning (i.e. from the date of the signature of the Bologna Declaration) and Russia – from the year 2003. Both states within a long period of time had a common system of higher education. This system included recognition of diplomas, a common basis for training scientific and teaching personnel, with Russian language being the main language of the educational process, etc. Having entered the European Union in 2004 Latvia is really interested in its active role as the EU member state.

At the EU-Russia summit held in Saint-Petersburg in 2003 higher education was declared a constituent element of the cooperation between Russia and the EU member states. Latvia, on the one hand, being one of the first participants of the Bologna process and, on the other hand, being a state that is well acquainted with the system of higher education inherited from the Soviet past (with all its advantages and disadvantages) could act as a mediator of the cooperation on the behalf of the European Union, notably in the western regions of Russia. Furthermore, a strong command of the Russian language of the Latvia’s residents is highly advantageous for Latvia when developing such cooperation. At the same time within the framework of the Bologna process which presumes mobility for students and teachers, Russian speaking residents of Latvia gain a new opportunity of studying and teaching in Russia. Thus, the issue of the Russian language in Latvia that is one of the most excruciating problems in the Russian-Latvian relations could be solved.

Simultaneously the Bologna process will cause the reconstruction of the universities community as well. As a result at least three strata of universities will emerge. The first one will embrace the most successful and prestigious universities in the field of political science and the international relations (other educational directions will be effected by the same process), which will establish partnership relations with each other and form a professional network, thus seeking to monopolize the educational domain. The second stratum will comprise universities only partially belonging to the “the upper circle” but aiming at finally entering it. The third stratum will comprise universities-“outsiders” which function “on the brink of survival”. It needs no saying that the borders between three strata will be flexible, but it is mostly the universities of the first group that will form the “core” of the European political elite. The latter will not only possess solid professional knowledge, but will also retain interpersonal ties and relations established in studentship that will influence a political decision-making process in Europe.
The European universities may also take a substantial part in the civil society development, notably in the East European states. The university is a key structure unit of the Bologna process which rests on the Magna Carta Universitatetum adopted in Bologna in 1988 on the occasion of the ninth centenary celebration of the oldest university in Europe. The Magna Carta Universitatetum points out the autonomous status of the university, its right to take decisions on entering the Bologna process, on choosing partners, on determining credits for a certain subject, etc. By granting autonomy to the university the problem of compatibility between educational programmes of different universities is solved. It results in the creation of a very flexible system which supposes “self-adjusting mechanism” of the university education.

The university represents a structural unit of the civil society as well. University professors deliver public lectures, university lecture halls become the arena where the most acute political problems are discussed. In their day universities took an important part in the formation and the development of democracy in Europe. Nowadays they are likely to become a part of Renaissance of a kind, however, this process will be different in its scale and qualitative characteristics.

Finally, one more aspect of high importance is that it is not only various universities that would enter the Bologna process in different ways, but certain states with their educational traditions, language, geographical setting and so on and so forth will also join the Bologna process in their own fashion.

In this respect Russia enjoys a special position. After entering the Bologna process Russia, naturally, has assumed jurisdiction of the Declaration over the whole of its territory. However, it is obvious that the European part of Russia, especially its North-West region, will be involved in the Bologna process more actively than the Far East region due to its relevant financial accessibility for the European universities in the context of student exchanges and firmly established ties between the universities. For the same reasons the Far-Eastern universities and partially the universities of the Siberian region will seek partnership relations with the universities of the USA and other states of the region.

At first sight a huge geographical extent may seem to pose a threat of Russia’s losing a common educational space with far-reaching political consequences. However, it is not the case. Diversity of regions, their “specialization” may, if conducting a due policy, become an important advantage for Russia in safeguarding its territorial integrity. The main point is that the states of other regions are facing the necessity to respond to the integration of the European education and have to take measures aimed at promoting compatibility of higher education of different universities in any single field. Under these circumstances a necessity to create a kind of “adapter” between European and American systems of education as well as between other educational systems in the region will inevitably emerge. And in this context Russian universities, especially those in the Far East, may benefit from “mediator functions”. However, the question at issue is how to accumulate solid knowledge of various
educational systems in order to win the advantage. Indeed, educational systems will “interact” directly, though a region has unique opportunities to become a laboratory of a kind for interpenetration of several educational systems at once. Russia acting as a “mediator” would be able to take an active part in the Bologna process and to develop its most valuable components. In this respect it is possible if not to overcome then at least to take the edge off the Versailles syndrome which Russia obtained as an outcome of the Cold War.