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**POST-SOVIET SPACE
IN CONTEMPORARY
CURRICULA
AND COOPERATION
PROJECTS**



This article analyzes the current situation and prospects of the post-Soviet themes research in Russian higher education in the Humanities. The problem is considered in the context of the modernization of the national education, integration processes in the former Soviet Union, globalization and the development of international cooperation.

Key words: countries of the Baltic Sea region, interdisciplinary approach, education, post-Soviet space, the Commonwealth of Independent States, "Russian World", cooperation, forum.

The demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the end of the Soviet era and at the same time served as an impetus for the creation of a fundamentally new geopolitical configuration on the Eurasian continent, and presented some new challenges of a political, military, social and humanitarian character. In the space that once used to be one huge country, there were several subjects of international law — several independent states. Developing relations with these states, according to the accepted concept of our foreign policy is a priority for the Russian Federation.

In recent years, Russia has increasingly been developing research in the former Soviet Union, including countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic states. These topics are gradually entering university curricula. Many university departments of the Humanities introduced courses on the so-called post-Soviet countries as one of the themes of contemporary history. Moreover, new education and research units directly involved in studying the post-Soviet countries were formed.

The post-Soviet problems stirred interest in dissertation councils specializing in universal history. Experts in the neighboring countries relations are in demand both in government agencies involved in the interaction between Russia and the post-Soviet space countries, and private businesses which are active in the region. Fundamental changes in political, social, economic and other spheres which occurred in the 1990s brought about relevant changes in the field of education.

Modernization of education proved to be necessary in response to the challenge of time. It is common knowledge that in the information and technology society of the XXI century, the educational level of the nation, the nation's ability to develop advanced technologies will become a determining factor in competition. As a well-known researcher J. Radulovic noted in his works, modern society will increasingly be focusing on strengthening human resources, and the education system in line with European standards and principles of continuous education.

The development of cooperation in education between the CIS countries is high on the agenda of the Commonwealth summits and bilateral talks of post-Soviet leaders. However, we cannot say that since the demise of the Soviet Union, the potential for the collaboration in this field has been used to the full.

Centrifugal tendencies have affected not only the political and economic spheres, but also mechanisms of social and cultural interaction, although the logic of the independent states development dictates a different choice- to keep the single education space in order to improve the competitiveness of the CIS countries.

Schools having Russian as a language of instruction have been and continue to be a pressing problem of cultural and linguistic policies in the system of compulsory and vocational education in the post-Soviet space. The same holds true for training, registration and publication of research and methodology works in Russian, having Russian as a language of instruction in schools and universities, and the development of joint research projects.

The Russian State University for the Humanities (RGGU) in 2006 established a centre for the study of post-Soviet countries, which was later transformed into a university department. Significant progress in the study of the post-Soviet countries in RGGU has already been achieved. It resulted in better provision for the study process, the development of online resources, publication of new course books, monographs and programmes, organization of conferences and roundtables, including international ones. At present, given the experience of recent years it has become apparent that this activity should be seen as an interdisciplinary one while the regional approach must still prevail. Only a comprehensive understanding of the current status and history of the CIS countries will provide the opportunity to professionally carry out research and create a comprehensive and clear system of knowledge which is not fragmented in its content. As for the interdisciplinary approach, it should be understood not only as a link between different fields of knowledge, rather it should be applied within each science. For example, in historical research, the interdisciplinary approach provides a synthesis of sources, historiography, history, theory and methodology, study and research, quantitative methods, etc.

Relations between states are largely determined by the format of their interaction in various economic, military and political associations and unions — the CIS, CSTO, EurAsEC, CES, etc. Disputes regarding the nature of the interaction never seem to stop among politicians, economists and political scientists. The two paradigms that characterize the essence of the new political and economic union—a new form of integration, or forms of "civilized divorce" — have their supporters and opponents. In this respect, it is necessary to intensify the dichotomy research into integration and disintegration processes, to evaluate the activity of the above mentioned bodies, their genesis, function and the role they play in today's world.

At the present stage of the post-Soviet countries research, it seems appropriate to move away from the overarching approach, regarding the post-Soviet countries only as an object, or subject of the Russian foreign policy. In the present study this research cannot be limited to analyzing bilateral ties between Russia and the neighboring countries. After all, there are formats that unite Russia with both immediate neighbours and other partners, for example the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which includes countries of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, and China. To an even greater extent, this postulate concerns the Baltic Sea region: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia formed a fundamentally different geopolitical space. The concept of immediate or the post-Soviet neighbourhood is closely related to the concept of the Russian one. Russia and

its neighbourhood is a unique place where one can observe the development of specific relationships between the phenomena of language, culture and ethnicity. The concept of the Russian world in recent years has become a part of domestic and foreign policies of the Russian Federation, as it allows us to understand its role and place in the international context, including the former Soviet Union space. It is not only a condition for the formation of an objective view on the world historical process, but also an important aspect for understanding and predicting the contemporary socio-cultural processes. The concept of Russian world in addition to being a purely educational and research component is also an object of international politics, especially in the Baltic States.

Learning the official languages of the post-Soviet countries is a priority for training highly qualified specialists. This will allow future students to not only communicate in the national languages, but also to work with documents, which is especially important for the study of the history of the past two decades, when business correspondence and documents were translated into the national languages of the neighbouring countries.

The organization of teaching and research work on the problems of the post-Soviet countries should be based on broader cooperation of universities, exchanging views and ideas both within Russia and internationally. This cooperation can and should manifest itself not only in holding joint conferences and round tables, but also in joint publications of collections of articles, monographs, organization of joint summer schools, enhanced student and faculty exchange.

Prospects for building a single education network in the post-Soviet space can be viewed in several ways. This is a process of shaping a "common market" of education services, including the implementation of such projects as the opening of the SCO University, building dynamic cooperation schemes of higher education, further strengthening the relevant legal framework of such cooperation, and creating a structure which can monitor and steer this cooperation.

In recent years, Russian academic community has offered a new form of cooperation with universities in other countries. These are international fora and unions, innovative in their character, opening up new opportunities for intensifying cooperation in the field of education, research and culture. These fora have already started their activities. Several organizations have been set up lately — the Forum of rectors of universities and deans of the faculty of humanities in Russia and France, the Forum of university rectors and deans of humanities in Russia and Germany, the next step is the setting up of a forum of university rectors and deans of humanities of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Of course, it is more urgent but at the same time more challenging (considering the political aspect of it) to create an international inter-university organization involving the Baltic Sea states.

The political will and a clear vision of the importance of cooperation encourage the integration of education in the post-Soviet space. And it is in the interest of Russia to be in the vanguard of the modernization "of the Eurasian education community". In more pragmatic terms, it will be necessary to work with both the political and economic elites of the former Soviet Union countries. In most post-Soviet states there is an understanding of the importance of mutually beneficial cooperation in the field of education. This initiative comes both from the university senior management, and the academic community.