

Let Us Look into the Myths

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The criticism of the Academy of Sciences present in the article 'Six Myths of the Academy of Sciences' [1] requires an in-depth response because implies itself utter myths. I shall dwell on some of them.

The first one points to RAS, allegedly, objecting against the return of researchers who have abandoned Russia. This is a lie, another story that setting up special conditions for potential 'returners' is considered by RAS incorrect. In this way, we convert those who remained here and went on developing Russian science, in exceptionally hard conditions, into second-rate persons. I know that many of our scientific 'emigrants', willing to return, realize that if they get significant privileges it will give rise to heavy moral problems in scientific collectives. If you wish to create conditions, these must apply to all.

References to China do not work because, in contrast to Russia, China experiences rapid growth of research in all scientific disciplines, massive building of new scientific centers which attract young people by new growth opportunities in science and career. And established researchers, stars – special stake is made on them in China because their specific 'image' importance is recognized – return to the country inclusively to attain a special high status and guided by patriotic ideas, willing to take part in the rebirth of their native country.

I shall not repeat what has been told by my colleagues about using the citation index as main assessing tool for researcher's work; I shall only mention that due to the specificity of the shaping and development of our Academy, which has traditionally fulfilled governmental tasks in the area of defense and security, many colleagues, RAS scientific institutes and Academy members themselves are engaged in works, which do not imply numerous open publications.

One more myth is created by the authors of the article which attributes to the Academicians the viewpoint without the Academy there is no science. To me, nobody among the Academicians has uttered and could not utter it because he realizes: there is a great variety of forms to organize scientific activities in the world. Yes, in Russia things have been shaped this way. In the U.S. and Germany the form is different, but it comes to nobody's mind in these countries to suggest their scientific system should be transformed in consistency with a common design. It is, however, indisputable that RAS became Russia's scientific brand and many people among our 'scientific immigrants' still stand on the personnel list of Russian scientific institutions, including for the sake of reaffirming their high scientific status.

True, in many developed countries a considerable volume of fundamental studies is made in universities and in other institutions as well. In reality, in the U.S. 56 percent of national allocations for fundamental science fall on universities. The remaining funds are distributed among state laboratories (16 percent), industrial science (15 percent) and non-profit organizations (13 per cent). A typical example of state laboratories in the U.S. are National Institutes of Health (NIH) with a yearly budget of more than \$30 bln.

By criticizing the Academy the authors of the article, nevertheless, acknowledge that its many misfortunes stem from lacking funding and that present-day financing of the Academy should be raised 'several times (better by a factor)', though they immediately note it is not realistic in conditions of state budget deficit, therefore, they suggest a certain set of recovery measures to the Academy under existing conditions. This set of measures, in my view, sins by obvious scarcity.

I shall not list all suggestions, but underline only three of them. First, international audit of institutes and laboratories is suggested to close or convert institutes without serious researches done into joint-stock companies. I'd like to note the existence of these or those scientific institutions and research lines should,

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probably, be determined not by foreign experts but by state interests. Digressing from the fact that the suggestion is simply insulting for Russia, up to now a world scientific power, it should be underlined that this audit is sensible if first-class researchers of world level are engaged in it. The question arises: How much will it cost? May be it would be better to spend the money for our own science? And, finally: Don't the authors realize that they, in fact, suggest an open public display of what may be the essence of scientific priority, a commercial secret, a state secret possessed even by ruined scientific institutions? Can anybody imagine such a suggestion advanced to their scientific institutions by, say, US or French scientists?

Second, it is suggested grant funding of science should increase on the account of grants extended by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) and the Russian Foundation for Humanities (RFH). Who would be against it? As if it depends on the Academy and not on the same budget. The same refers to scientific personnel rotation.

Third, it is suggested researchers' pensions should be raised by 'professionally managing RAS property on the transitional stage'. Apparently, the transition to liquidate the Academy. I'll note that the pension reform is a most complicated state and even global problem, and it is strange the government and the Ministry of Finance do not know up to now it is so easy to solve it. Russia has much property, apart from the academic one, which may be professionally managed. But somehow nobody succeeds in it. All this is no serious talk.

[1] /printissues/expert/2009/48/6mifov_akademii_nauk/

References:

[1] /printissues/expert/2009/48/6mifov_akademii_nauk/