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RUSSIAN STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES HISTORIC DYNAMIC OF THE STUDY ABROAD TRENDS. ANALYSIS OF THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

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Summary

The paper is focusing on evaluating how the changes that took place in Russia in the last decade of the 20th Century and in the first decade of the 21st Century are affecting students from Russia motivation and ability to study in the United States.

In greater details the paper is researching how specific historic movements and events, such as demands of the Communist ideology, the demise of the Communist Party, the collapse of the Soviet Union, a struggle for democracy and pluralism, economic chaos in Russia, the raise of autocracy, growing nationalism, xenophobic foreign policies, and strained US-Russia relations, influenced the enrollment of students from Russia into Higher Education Institutions in the United States.

Key Words: Study abroad, Russia, students, United States, historic, political, economic dynamic.

Introduction

For many decades, the United States (US) has been attracting international students from all over the world. Scientists describe factors that motivate foreigners to study overseas as "push-pull" model. The "push" factors are forces that encourage students to leave their country of origin. Among them are political repressions, economic instability, corruption, inadequate financial rewards associated with obtaining a higher level of education, low quality of education, inadequate

educational opportunities, and low priority placed on education by the country's government. "Pull" factors are forces within the host country; they include higher quality of life, social stability, safety, wider opportunities for research and professional growth, and more lucrative economic rewards associated with obtaining education in this specific place (Altbach, 2004; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; McMahon, 1992). This model contains political, economic, and social components that might shape the flow of international students into the US.

The purpose of this study is to research the connections of political, cultural, and economic dynamic in one country, Russia, and the "push-pull" factors that had been influencing the enrollment of students from this country into Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the US. The paper will focus on evaluating how the historic changes that took place in Russia in the last decade of the 20th Century and in the first decade of the 21st Century affected students from Russia motivation and ability to study in the US.

Dynamic of Students from Russia Enrollment into the Higher Education Institutions in the United State

The *Open Doors* report, which is issued annually by the Institute of International Education (IIE), published its first set of data about Russian students in the US HEIs in the time between 1994 and 1995. Two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of Russia as a new, independent country, the Open Door (2010) reported 4,832 students from that part of the world studying in the US universities. The following year that number increased by 15.7% and then again by 10.9% with 6,199 students from Russia enrolled in different HEIs across the country from 1996 to 1997. Following a steady growth, although not as dramatic an increase as through the late 1990s, the number of students from Russia had reached its zenith of 7,025 people in 1999/2000. The next decade was marked by an equally significant decline with a major drop of 11.3% in 2003-2004 and then another considerable decrease of 8.3% in 2004-2005. In the academic year of 2006-2007 the number of students from Russia in the US has fallen to 4,751 students, lower than when it was first calculated in 1994. The enrollment had continued fluctuating with a 3.3% increase in 2007-2008, no changes in 2008-2009 and 1.7% decrease in 2009-2010. Today the number of Russian students in the US HEIs is five people less than it was in 1994.

These peculiar fluctuations in students' enrollment didn't happen suddenly or in a vacuum. This paper is the journey into the history of the cultural, political, and economic realities of the Union of the Soviet Social Republics (USSR) and later the Federal Republic of Russia; the journey that, I hope, should help in understanding some of the educational processes in Russia.

Part 1. The USSR and the Perception of the US Culture

The Social Construction of Reality theory explains how media changes and influences people' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of reality, particularly in a situation when the exposure to the "reality" is curtailed (Severin, & Tankard, 1997). The overwhelming majority of the population in the USSR has never been to the US, and, as the result, their views of the US were formed and often distorted by the official media; the combination of official propaganda and personal imagination of citizens were replacing the reality.

Starting during the time of the Cold War, the Soviet propaganda machine had been methodically and successfully creating an image of the US as an "evil empire". For instance, a quick review of January-February, year 1960 issues of "*Pravda*" (*The Truth)* - the daily newspaper of the Communist Party- resulted in finding negative mentioning of the US in approximately 31 articles; with different authors calling US a country of a "rotten ideology", of purely materialistic values, of rampant racism, and imperial ambitions. In the seventies, during Brezhnev's time, many problems of the Soviet system, such as, for instance, food, clothing and housing deficits were explained and justified by the arms race competition imposed on the USSR by the American government. At the same time, the morsels of information, such as skyscrapers and sparkling city silhouettes on the background of the newspapers' photographs, stylish clothes and smiling faces occasionally glimpsed during the official TV reports, unbelievable stories of rare eyewitnesses were tantalizing. The system of underground jokes, that substituted the freedom of speech in the USSR, described the feelings of Russians toward "rotten imperialistic America", as the Russian media would refer to the US, in one short sentence *"I'd like to visit America so I can enjoy rotting with them at least a little bit."*

The description provided by American journalist Keith Gessen (2011) in the latest New Yorker, probably offers the most emotional and exciting account of the feeling Soviets had toward America.

> For members of that Soviet generation, America was everything. They listened to its music, read its novels, translated its poetry. They caught bits and pieces of America wherever they could (including on trips to Poland). America "was like a homeland in reserve for us", Sergeev (who translated, among others, Robert Frost) later wrote (p. 80).

The appeal of the unknown was so exhilarating, it even caused creation of a fashion movement among the Soviet youth of the 1950's and 1960's called "*stilyagi"* (stylish people or hipsters). *Stilyagy* admired "American music, dances, and dress style. Channels of this "infection" were "trophy films, seized during the war, music records and journals, brought by those few of the elite who could travel abroad, and, importantly, jazz broadcasts on shortwave radio" (Karpova, 2009, p.1). Admiration of the American culture and desire to go against mainstream made these youngsters ideological enemies. Soviet journalist Kruzhkov wrote in the February 1957 issue of *"Komsomolskaja Pravda" (Komsomol Truth)*- newspaper of the Russian youth.

> Stilyagi … utterly repulsive young men, with their ultra-modish jackets, their ultra-tight and ultra –short trousers and their eccentric neckties in all colors of the rainbow, and with an air of self-stupidity in their faces… Our people… have nicknamed these wretched creatures' stilyagi and scum, but the wretched creatures turn their noses and show little concern. They imagine themselves to be bearer of and-mind you- apologists for "Western culture". (Kruzhkov, 1957, p.2)

Despite officially imposed ridicule, the *stilyagi's* style and the freedom associated with it were attracting large masses, overriding the danger of prosecution. In the Viktor Slavkin's (1979) play "A Grown up Daughter of a Young Man", a protagonist is expelled from a university for having his band play an American song "Chattanooga Choo-Choo".

Stilyagi's thirst for difference, despite the ideological blockade, brought American culture into the lives of Russian youth making youngsters fear, but, at the same time, dream about experiencing this unique, dangerous, colorful, and intoxicatingly different country. Boris Grushin (2001), one of the first scholars in Russia who started researching public opinion, found out that in sixties and seventies people knew very little about the US, but the overwhelming majority of them were eager to learn more about American life, American economics and American teenagers.

The eighties marked the dramatic shift in Soviet media coverage of the US. In December of 1985, American journalist Phil Donahue and Russian journalist Vladimir Pozner connected Russians in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and Americans in Seattle in real time in the broadcast called "The Televised Bridges." The impact of this show was tremendous: Americans acquired bodies, faces, and voices; the United States of America turned from the chimerical image into an almost palpable reality. The show served as both a harbinger of the political thaw and a precursor to the upcoming avalanche of information and opportunities. Indeed, the iron curtain had been lifted and the "forbidden fruit" became available. The American movies, books, clothes, hairstyles, vocabulary as well as business firms, educators, economic and political consultants flooded Russia in the last decade of the twentieth century.

The cinema critique Alexander Fedorov (1999), describing the movie market of the nineties, asserted

> Only ten years ago Russian audiences generally watched Russian movies. Now the repertoire of Russia' movie theaters consists almost completely of American pictures… The law of film marketing dictates theatres' repertoire.., the old American films (maybe B-class) are relatively cheap to acquire compare with new Russian films and they fill the seats… The time of the bans, when every amusing foreign film seemed to Russians a tasty yet inaccessible serving of semi-underground, "closed" screenings, has passed (p.141).

Many TV shows and sitcoms were adapted from the US media products. The Wheel of Fortune translated as Field of Miracles (*Pole Chudes*) - so dynamic, so different, and so thrilling- drew huge audiences as an alternative form of entertainment. The soap opera *Santa Barbara* forced millions of Russians to TV screens, introducing a new way of dressing, decorating, talking, even dating; giving an abstract, seen-by-no-one-America an actual image, a real dimension. The popular joke of the nineties said

> *If you get a chance to go to America, where will you land?*
> *In Santa Barbara, California.*
> *But why?*
> *Silly, because I know everyone there.*

Additionally, Russians were experiencing a "publishing bust", an unprecedented increase in the availability of foreign literature of all genres, as well as uncensored coverage of the world news from the increasing number of newspapers, private broadcasting companies, and magazines. Richter (1991) and Lukosiunas (1991) have researched the content of two Russian newspapers *Izvestija* (The News) and *Novoe Vremya* (The New Time) published in 1989. They concluded that in that year media had mostly showed fascination by the US, creating a positive, even idealistic image of a

country from which the Soviets could and should learn.

The cultural and political isolation of the fifties, sixties, and seventies followed by the overabundance of the tantalizing videos and audios of the eighties made the Russian population ripe for different possibilities. The "pull" factors of the American lifestyle and culture were attracting millions of young minds. On one hand, the generation of "fathers"-former *"stilyagi"*- that had viewed US as a forbidden and exciting land now could fulfill their dreams of experiencing it at least through their children. Furthermore, the youth indoctrinated by the attractive images of the US yearned to become part of this glitzy and alluring life. Finally, the economic and political changes that followed the demise of the Soviet Union provided necessary means-"push factors'- for the transition.

Part 2. Demise of the USSR. Economic and Political Changes of the "Wild" Nineties

On the early morning of December 8th, 1991, in the national forest of Belovezskaya Pushha, the heads of the three Soviet Union Republics, Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Federation, Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine, and Stanislav Shushkevitch of Belorussia signed the Agreement of the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States. On December 26th of 1991 the official announcement about the demise of the Soviet Union was made and the Russian Federation was named the official successor of the Soviet Union; it also took its place in the Proliferation and Security Committee of the United Nations.

The radical economic policies, that were immediately implemented, made a profound impact on the Russian citizenry, among other things, eliminating financial equality or as the underground jokes used to say *"a great Soviet opportunity of being equally poor"*. According to Andres Aslund (1995), an economic advisor to the Russian government from November 1991 to January of 1994, as the result of the economic reforms "fixed arbitrary prices as well as wage controls have disappeared altogether. With few exceptions… prices have been liberalized. Foreign trading rights have been liberalized… Money became active instantly after the decontrol of prices in January 1992. All kinds of markets have emerged" (pp.4-5).

While analyzing the full range of implications associated with economic reforms in Russia is beyond the scope of this paper, we have to admit that inevitably the reform led to the development of a new layer of a wealthy population financially capable of, among other things, sending their children to study abroad. Also, these people, either by training, experience, or former status of Soviet elite that allowed them travelling abroad, were foresighted enough to see the benefits of it.

The underground humor presented these changes in its own way.

Two former classmates bump into each other at the Visa Department of the US Embassy in Moscow. One is in rugs; another one is well groomed and expensively dressed. They asked each other what brought them to the Embassy.

The first one replies: "You see, I was a professor at the university, but the government stopped paying my salary and the inflation skyrocketed. I was literary starving, so I

contacted some colleagues in the US. They arranged for me to work in the science lab there, and I am here to get my visa. What about you?"

The second says: "I was working at the factory. The government stopped paying my salary as well. I started going to Poland, buying Marlboro cigarettes there for 2 rubles a pack, selling it in Moscow for 6 rubles. And believe it or not this meager 4% provide for a very comfortable lifestyle."

The first comments: "Oh, my! You had always been horrible at math."

The second one agrees: "Yes, I know. However, I've been to America recently and they seem to be good in combining math and business. I am getting a visa for my son to study there. He says that in US he can learn how to increase my profit from 4% to 5%."

However, financial ability to afford studying abroad, even the out-of-state tuition of the US universities, would have provided no access to studying abroad without an ability to leave Russia, and that required major changes in the internal immigration law and mobility policies.

Internal changes: immigration law and citizens' mobility.

Keeping citizens within the impenetrable walls of the Soviet Union had always been a priority of a communist government, therefore, just a few years after the establishments of the USSR in 1921, the free travel outside of the USSR stopped. Every individual who wanted to go abroad had to receive an authorization to leave the country- an exit visa- which was only given to diplomats and other individuals performing official government duties. During Brezhnev' era some exit visas for international short-term tourism to countries of the "social camp" were allowed, but never to the US (Ivanov, Vishnevsky, & Zakharov, 2006). The only exceptions were made during waive of the Jewish emigration of the seventies and eighties, but these emigrants were receiving exit visas without an opportunity to return.

> In May 1991, the USSR adopted a new law on the entry and exit modalities, guaranteeing that international law in matters of freedom of movement would be respected; this law was supposed to be implemented through the whole USSR territory from January 1, 1993. The USSR ceased to exist at the end of 1991, but the law was nonetheless implemented in the Russian Federation and remained in force until federal law was adopted, on August 15, 1996 (Ivanov, Vishnevsky, & Zakharov, 2006, p.429).

This law said that "every citizen of the Russian Federation can freely circulate outside of the borders of the Russian Federation and freely return to the Russian Federation" ("Federal Law of the Russian Federation", 1991, p.1). The doors from Russia had finally opened, liquidating the last internal political barrier for leaving the country.

External changes: western presence.

The external factors had also influenced the development of the study- in- the-US options for the Russian citizens. In the early 1990's, western non-government organizations (NGOs) and

government agencies, among them US organizations such as MacArthur Foundation, International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Institute, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the American Council for International Education, have entered Russia aiming to contribute financially and intellectually to the advancement of human rights, citizens' opportunities, information sharing, social activism and engagement. Some of the US NGOs have focused on building and supporting intellectual strength and capacity in Russia, among other things, and offering counseling, direct funding and administrative support to the Russian youth to study in the HEIs in the US.

In 1987 American Councils had begun overseeing exchange and training programs for Russian youth. One of the American Councils programs, Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX), has been providing US government sponsored scholarships for high school students from Russia to "travel to the United States, attend a US high school for a full academic year and live with a US host family" (American Councils, n.d., para 1). Upon return from the US, FLEX alumni partner with their local educational institutions to organize US education focused events and to provide information about acquiring US student visas (American Councils, 2009).

In 1989, another organization, IREX, opened its first office in Moscow and in 1991 initiated "the Modems for Democracy program providing free Internet and e-mail access in Russia and Ukraine" (IREX, n.d., para 1), which gave Russians a free entry to the variety of international information sources. In 1994, IREX started administering the USAID-funded institutional Partnership Project, "connecting US universities and NGOs with counterparts in Russia" (IREX, n.d., para 1). In the following years IREX has opened offices in almost all Russian major cities with a population over a million people, running 18 different programs there. Many of these programs focused on promoting Study Abroad and other educational opportunities for the Russian youth, among most successful were Global Undergraduate Exchange Program, Youth Development Competencies Program, and University Administration Support Program.

In 1992 the US Congress established the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program and a year later a FREEDOM Support Act Graduate Fellowship Program (FSA) to support democracy and economic development in the former Soviet Union republics. The Muskie/FSA program provides full scholarships, placement, visa and administrative support to citizens of the former Soviet Union republics, including Russia, for a two-year Study Abroad at the master's degree level in the US universities (IREX, n.d.).

In 1987 the Soros Fund, founded by the American billionaire George Soros, launched an Open Society Institute in Russia, joining Russia with the network of funds and institutions that has already been established in more than 30 countries of the world. The Fund invested approximately $650 million in developing and implementing programs all over Russia targeting areas of education, culture, health care, free media, and human rights. "Ten of thousands of scholars and teachers, students and professors... have received grants from the Soros Foundation" (Frontier, n.d., para 1). The Soros Foundation' influence was so visible that the popular Russian singer Timur Shaov called Russian academicians of the nineties "the George Soros' nestlings" in one of his songs.

Additionally, starting in early 1990's, the Fulbright program had sponsored 45-46 Russian scientists annually for their research work in US HEIs. Comparable number of US scholars were

teaching and doing research in the variety of universities in the Russian Federation (Fulbright Scholar Program, n.d.). We can suggest that Fulbright scholars made their own impact on Russian students' decisions to study in the US. While there is no work that assesses the impact of the Fulbright scholars from Russia on Russian youths' desire to study abroad, the work by Stanford Research Institute International (SRI) (2002) had shown that 80% of Fulbright Scholars returning to their home institutions after time abroad encourage students to study abroad and 73% "incorporate their Fulbright experience into curricula or teaching methods" (p. 4). It seems safe to imagine that the US Fulbright scholars in Russia affected their students' interest in experiencing educational options offered by the US institutions as did their Russian counterparts upon their return from the United States.

Undoubtedly there were other US organizations and initiatives helping in addressing emerging financial inequalities in Russia, reaching out to the varieties of populations, and offering support for people's educational pursuits. In 2006 a famous Russian TV producer and actress, Anastasia Mel'nikova, created a semi documentary show aimed at portraying changes that happened in Russia in the nineties. She named this show *"Lihije 90-e"* (The Wild 1990's). Indeed, the nineties in Russia, informally described as a time period from December 1991 to the start of Vladimir Putin's presidency, were precisely this- turbulent, controversial, unpredictable, devastating, exhilarating, and *wild-*, "the time when everything was allowed" (Lukomor'e, 2011, para 3). Lyudmila Alekseeva, a Chair and a founder of the Moscow Helsinki Group, made probably the most accurate description of that time: "society was left to its own devices and we managed to build civil society while the "power elites" struggled among themselves and ignored the lower strata" (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2006, para 2) . She has also named the time of Yeltsin's presidency to be the "golden age" for the international NGOs in Russia, even thought she didn't consider Yeltsin to be a "strong democrat" (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2006, para 2).

Turbulent 90th had evoked a plethora of responses from country's citizens. Some rejected the change, as many people often reject it; some hated it, because these revolutionary transformations deprived millions of everything they believed in; some rejoiced in hope of a better future; some manipulated the moment for their own immediate benefits; some sank to the depth of poverty, alcoholism, and despair, yet others decided to enrich their lives and hopefully the lives of others through the unprecedented historic opportunity to study in the US. Whatever it was, Russian realities of the 1990's were "pushing" these young men and women out of the country and the doors were opened. The youth learned English, mastered computers, found financial resources, reached out to international NGOs, and made thousands of other steps. In 1994, a group of 4,832 people from Russia begun their journeys in the sea of educational opportunities offered by the US universities. By the end of the century this number had almost doubled.

Part 3. Putin's Russia

Gorbachev's Russia is a cemetery of communism
Yeltsin's Russia is a cemetery of empty vodka bottles
Putin's Russia is a cemetery of hope
(Russian underground humor)

To understand the dynamic of the Study Abroad enrollment in US HEIs in Russia in early

21st century, it is important to evaluate political dynamic in Russia of that time, particularly the circumstances that have been forming the attitudes of the Russian youth toward the United States.

The Russia-US relationship started deteriorating in 2002. After the events of 9/11, Moscow accommodated the request of the Bush administration to support the US war in Afghanistan by allowing US military bases in central Asia. In return, Russian leaders expected the US to stop their criticism of Russia's policy in Chechnya, but the US rejected this request, thus placing the first stone in the wall of Russia-US animosity. Soon after, in 2003, Russia joined France and Germany in decrying the US war in Iraq. In 2004, with the blessing of the United States, eight former Warsaw Agreement countries, including three former Baltic republics, joined the National Atlantic Treaty committee (NATO), which Putin's administration viewed as a "US intrusion in its sphere of influence" (Aslund & Kuchins, 2009, p.2). The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in the Fall of 2004 escalated Russia's bitterness towards the US even more. The Russian administration had tried to alter presidential elections there in favor of a pro-Moscow candidate Yanukovitch, and, although the US didn't take the lead in diplomatic response to it, the Kremlin described the international protest to its actions as "a US-led conspiracy against its influence in its "near boarder"" (Aslund & Kuchins, 2009, p.2).

In response to the unfavorably changing geopolitical landscape and Russia's growing authoritarian regime and bureaucratic corruption, Putin's Cabinet elected to follow a popular Soviet route of diverting citizens' attention from the country's problems to an external enemy. At first the enemy accused was the West, for financing international NGOs in Russia, so they would interfere in the Russian internal affairs in their own favor. In 2005, during the meeting with the Kremlin-formed panel of civil right supporters Putin asserted "I am categorically opposed to foreign financing of political activities in the Russian Federation. Not a single self-respecting state permits it. And we won't permit it. Let us resolve the internal political problems of Russia ourselves. We're not a caveman society" (Kashkovsky, 2005, para 1).

On April 15, 2006, the Russian Federation passed a "Russian NGO Law". The Law increased the NGOs' registration requirements to 100 pages of documents asking for all sorts of information, including death certificates of the deceased founders, "and any mistake in the paperwork can be ground for denial of registration, essentially providing the government with another excuse to dissolve- or refuse to recognize legally- organization"(Kamhi, 2006, p. 35). The new law, among other things, also banned anonymous donations, and expanded the power of the Russian government to supervise and control NGOs activities, forcing dozens of international NGOs to leave Russia (Kamhi, 2006). The number of Fulbright scholars from Russia quickly decreased by 22% (Fulbright Scholar Program, n.d.).

In 2006, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) interviewed Barry Lowenkron, a former Vice President of International Programs of the MacArthur Foundation and the US State Department Assistant secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, about how the NGO crackdown might affect Russia and US-Russian relationships. Lowenkron (2006) called Russia's policy toward international NGOs a threat toward Russian nascent democracy.

This statement was supported by other political leaders, which, contrary to the expected reaction, has caused the official Putin's rhetoric to turn "explicitly anti-American. Putin has

accused the United States of seeking to impose its ideas and interests on the rest of the world" (Mendelson & Gerber, 2008, p.132). In his official speech at the Red Square during the celebration of the 62nd anniversary of the Great Patriotic War, (the Victory Day, as it is called in Russia, is the most celebrated holiday in the country), Putin compared the United States with the Third Reich. "The United States has overstepped their national borders in every way. This country imposes its economics, political, cultural, and educational policies on other nations" (Putin, 2007, translated from Russian by Natalia Rekhter).

The speech was immediately posted on the website "www.youtube.com". More than 41,400 people saw this clip, 158 left comments, of which 114 were complimentary of Putin: "V. Putin puts Russia back to full health" (HanChineze, 2009), and hateful towards the US: "Al Qaeda and Chechens terrorists were driven/financed/created (Al Qaeda) by USA to destroy USSR and Russia" (Thun4er, 2009).

Putin's approach, strongly supported by the national media- the main source of information for the majority of the population in Russia- (Kononova, 2007), wasn't innovative, but the history of the Soviet Union had proved it to be effective. Indeed, after researching the attitudes of 21st century Russian youth toward US, Mendelson and Gerber (2008) concluded

> today, although young Russians have embraced lattes, iPods, and other consumer goods enjoyed by youth in Western countries, their political views tend to be neither pro-Western nor pro-democratic. Young Russians are not, however, monolithic. Although majorities largely embrace Putin's anti-American message (p.134).

This opinion was supported by research and observations of other scientists. Shiraev and Marhovskaja (2007) provided their detailed account of the "Americanization" of Russian life

> They watched re-runs of "Sex and the City" on Russian television, checked their TV guides for the next NHL and NBA games, and downloaded (often illegally) the music files of the latest American hip-hop or rock sensations. Jack Daniels was served in Moscow bars, and Jeep Cherokees and Lincolns moved down narrow Russian highways (p. 119).

They also noted that "Russian cared less about America and cared more about their own economic aspirations" (Shiraev & Marhovskaja, 2007, p.119). This last observation was particularly oxymoronic. While the US culture and goods have proliferated the lives of the Russians, the country population' apathy towards the US has grown and they knew less and less about it. Anastasia Kononova (2007) in her study "Media effect on Russian students in the perception of the United States" cited the research of Igor Nagdasev, the director of the Russian Center for Civic Education, who found out that contemporary Russians didn't know much about America and certainly "knew even less about America than their parents and grandparents who lived in the Soviet Union" (Kononova, 2007, p.22).

It seems that for the Russians of the 21st century, all attributes of the American culture stopped being associated with the US, and instead they became part of the daily routine and convenience, while America as a country and a superpower, in the eyes of the population, has been

gradually morphing into an omnipotent and treacherous enemy, "a boa constrictor who ate a half of the world" (Shiraev & Marhovskaya, 2007, p.120). Really, what sane person would want his or her children to learn anything from such a monster?!

Additionally, the Kremlin has cultivated quasi-patriotism and xenophobia among the Russian youth, successfully forming a "Putin generation"-young people, born between 1976 and 1991- who "favor the restoration of a hypersovereign Russia that remains outside of the Euro-Atlantic community and resists or rejects international legal norms" (Mendelson & Gerber, 2008, p.131). The Russian nationalist idea was an easy sell in the framework of the country's economic growth that fed the national pride. Indeed, "during the eight years of Vladimir Putin's presidency, Russia's economy grew by 70%" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010, p.15), fuelled by the rising prices of the raw materials and oil that Russia has been exporting to the world markets (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010).

That nationalism campaign also exploited a concept of Soviet nostalgia, which helped in filling a void left after the ideological chaos of the nineties and eventually, in addressing a growing population's disappointment with loosing Russia's supremacy and empirical status in many areas of international politics. Shiraev and Marhovskaya (2007) describing that situation emphasized

> to millions of Russians, the fall of the Soviet Union created an immeasurable psychologically gap between past and present. Once they were citizens of a gigantic multi-national superpower, both respected and feared around the world. Then, by the early 1990s, Russia had become a shrunken, second-rate nation unable to compete on the international stage (p.101).

The triangulation of growing anti-Americanism, expanding nationalism and diminishing, tightly controlled influence of the international NGOs had caused decrease in the interest of studying abroad among Russian youth, particularly to the educational opportunities in the US. "Pull" factors of America culture, lifestyle, economic prosperity and democracy were questioned, undermined, and compromised, "pushed" factors of internal realities reconstructed. Finally, in light of allegedly ominous foreign threats to the country's sovereignty and national identity, wanting to learn from "Russia's official enemy"-the United States- sounded almost treasonous.

The slow descent in the number of students from Russia studying in the United States had started in 2002 and continued throughout the first decade of the 21st century finally coming down to 4,827 people or five people less than it was in 1994.

Open Ending

During the 70 years of the Soviet regime, there were two times when the State High School Graduation Examination in History was cancelled. The first time it happened was in 1956, after Khrushchev's speech at the XXII Meeting of the Communist Party, where he denounced Stalin. The second time took place in1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and demise of the Communist Party. The history textbooks had to be re-evaluated, re-written and re-published, lessons' learning outcomes re-formulated, teachers re-trained, exams re-done. Orwell's utopian predictions became reality.

It is hard to predict the long-term impact that the contemporary Russian dynamic will have on its citizens' education. Will the history textbooks be re-written again? Will the Russians voluntarily curtail their own educational choices? The answers are unclear, but, as it is typical for Russia, underground humor already has its own prognosis. One joke portrays Putin's vision of it:

Russian radio announcement: Putin's daughter is graduating from high school and is thinking about to what university she should apply. The competition is high: 50 universities are competing for her admission. Putin is recommending US; he wants to secure her future.

Another joke depicts Russia 10 years from now.

President Putin is having dinner with the representatives of Ministry of Education.
Server: Have you made your choice, Mr. Putin?
Putin: Yes, I'll have a steak, well done.
Server: What about vegetables?
Putin: Vegetables? Putin looks around his table. They'll have steaks as well.

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