



Role of scientist associations in scientific research and education: the Russian experience

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The general picture of science and education development in modern Russia would be incomplete without some significant appreciation of non-government organizations of scientists.

These include organizations created on the initiative of the state power-houses: the Russian Union of Rectors created in 1992 and the Russian Association in Support of Science created in 2011.

The organizations created by the scientists themselves are the SPASS (St. Petersburg Association of Scientists and Scholars) existing since 1989 and ONR (Society of the Scientists) organized in 2012. These proved to be of much more efficient activity.

Science and education of the post-Soviet Russia were a subject of the multiple studies. There was a lot of professional societies of scientists working in this or that scientific field in the USSR. Some of them originated before the revolution of 1917. During the Soviet period these associations played certain role in the development of science and education, but this role went down significantly in the 1990s and on, mostly because of the dependence on the state organization and funding. Recent attempts of the authorities to revive some of them, such as, for instance, the Russian Geographical Society, or the Russian Historical Society, so far failed to produce any results matching the corresponding efforts and expense. The independent associations of scientists and college employees proved to be much more efficient.

The Russian Union of Rectors created in 1992 represents the interests of administration. This organization formed on the initiative and support of the President of Russian Federation is rather influential, but it is recognized as a conservative one having close connections with the state power-houses.

On the other hand, the St. Petersburg Union of Scientists (= SPASS, St. Petersburg Association of Scientists and Scholars) was organized in 1989, mainly by a group of people from the Russian Academy of Sciences fighting, at that time, for the election of Academician A.D. Sakharov to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. SPASS now counts

25 years of an uninterrupted successful operation, a long and rather unusual term for any non-government, non-profit organization in modern Russia. SPASS unites now about 1000 researchers and university teachers who work not only in St. Petersburg, but in other Russian cities, as well as in other countries. It also maintains close partnership with EUROSCIENCE and AAAS. The main SPASS activities are: 1) professional expertise of the drafts laws concerning science and education, 2) organization of the independent research centers, expeditions, seminars, etc., 3) participation in setting up the new type of colleges, and support of the new educational programs, 4) dissemination and promotion of scientific achievements, and help for high school students in choosing their future scientific specialization, 5) some human rights activity.

SPASS is publishing two journals, one of them being a popular science magazine "Spring of Knowledge" for school students and teachers. SPASS is a founder of the two higher education institutions of new type: European Institute (St. Petersburg), and the High School for Religion and Philosophy (St. Petersburg). One should also mention the SPASS annual cross-disciplinary sessions where leading scientists report the newest scientific achievements in their respective fields explaining them for non-specialists, as well as organizing popular science TV and radio broadcasts.

In 2012 the Society of the Scientists (ONR, from the Russian abbreviation) came to existence; it also was created by scientists themselves, and it is more radical and more oriented towards the web activities and various protest actions. The role of this Society in the life of Russian scientific community is quite noticeable; ONR and SPASS maintain good partner relations.

The Russian Association in Support of Science was founded in 2011; it unites mainly the academic and university establishment, and was founded by the quite officious Public Chamber of Russian Federation. Because of this, the influence of this organization is so far weaker as compared to what had been planned by its organizers. All in all, the general picture of science and education development in modern Russia would be incomplete and ill described without some significant appreciation of non-government organizations of scientists, and their scientific and educational effect.