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Education in the service of ideology and political gain

The case of Russia

2023

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Education in the Service of Ideology and Political Gain

The Case of Russia

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INTRODUCTION

This report is an analysis of the transformations that have taken place in the Russian education system from 2000 to the present day. It examines how changes in the political and public life of Russia have influenced educational processes, the content of curriculum, and new educational trends.

Changes in the socio-political landscape of society directly impact the education system. In their turn, education institutions play a significant role in forming socio-political culture, by educating and training the younger generation for further participation in the life of society.

Education and its interconnection with the socio-political system is an important topic for analysis in understanding the dynamic of society and the processes which are taking place in it.

Within theoretical limits, different sociological schools emphasise different social aspects of education. Despite the diversity of approaches, they all emphasise the importance of education as an agent of socialisation of the younger generation, influenced by the standards and values of society.

Emil Durkheim, a representative of the functional approach in sociology, attributes an important role to education in instilling social values and standards, which are essential to ensure social solidarity and maintain the existing public order (Durkheim in Barnes, 1977).

Adherents of functionalism also emphasise the role of education in training young people to perform certain roles in society and acquire various professions, which ensures the effective functioning of society (Parsons, 1959). The feminist approach examines education from the standpoint of its role in forming and maintaining gender roles and inequality. In the opinion of representatives of the feminist school of sociology, education may be a tool for instilling stereotypes and inequality and inculcating discrimination, as well as a weapon for combatting it (Delamont, 1980).

Theorists of the conflict school also emphasise the role of education in spreading inequality, highlighting the role of education institutions in maintaining an imbalance in the distribution of power in the interest of dominating groups (Bowles and Gintis, 2002).

The interactionist approach examines education from the standpoint of social interactions (class dynamic, relations with the teacher), which influences the formation of individual personal identity and their choice of social role.

An examination of the theoretical foundations of education is not only important to understand social processes, but also has great practical importance, directly impacting educational practices and results.

In the modern world, education is a key factor of development for both the individual and society. Education plays a decisive role in training the younger generation for work activity and their successful adaptation to modern society. It helps to master the knowledge, skills, and competences required to withstand global challenges and achieve stable development of society, consolidate democracy, and defend human rights.

Nelson Mandela (Mandela, 1990) called education “the most powerful weapon that one can use to change the world”. Education in a democratic society is an effective means to maintain and develop democracy and human rights.

In a democratic society, education institutions play an important role in socialising young people, maintaining democratic principles, civil society, and respect for human rights, through the active involvement of the younger generation in democratic processes. The development of a democratic society and viable democratic institutions requires a mastery of critical thinking, an understanding and respect of human dignity and diversity, the values of democracy, and human rights.

Instilling democratic values from an early age allows future citizens to practice independent thinking and demand accountability from figures in power. Growing up with a belief in such values as respect and observance of human rights, freedom of speech, and the rule of law, children become adults capable of asking critical questions, studying different points of view on complex problems, and actively taking part in finding solutions and making decisions.

Education institutions support young people in developing not only academic knowledge and skills but also internalise them in values that are core to society and form the culture of it¹. The educational system of society is based and structured in accordance with the ideological concepts and values of the existing socio-political system. Education institutions play a key role in forming a civic position in the growing generation, thus ensuring that the existing political system of society is maintained.

However, education is also an effective tool in the hands of authoritarian regimes, helping them to preserve the existing socio-political system. Authoritarian regimes skilfully use education to consolidate their power, effectively minimising dissidence and questioning the existing public order. Not only the content of education (especially in humanitarian disciplines) but also the teaching and learning methods used in state schools further these aims.

Russian education minister Sergei Kravtsov called the country’s school system a central element in Moscow’s battle for “victory in the informational and psychological war” against the West (Kommersant, 2022a).

In general, education is both a reflection of the existing order and a tool for instilling and maintaining social values and standards, thus consolidating the existing order.

¹ The Council of Europe outlines 4 purposes of quality education: (1) to prepare young people for employment, (2) for lives as active citizens in democratic societies, (3) to ensure their personal development, and (4) the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base. Source: Council of Europe website <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/about#:~:text=The%20Council%20of%20Europe%20advocates,a%20broad%2C%20advanced%20knowledge%20base>

Thus, the present report examines reforms in the field of school and higher education in the Russian Federation in the past two decades. It analyses how the political and social system influences the education domain and examines the values inherent to each sphere. The report has examined tools and mechanisms employed by the existing political regime to influence the education system in Russia and their use for the promotion of the state's ideology, socialising the younger generation into norms and values of society, and instilling loyalty to the existing political system among them.

The report is based on publicly available sources, including studies and publications in the sphere of education, and expert assessments, and contains an analysis of curriculum and textbooks used in schools of the Russian Federation.

SECTION 1.

Understanding the political context



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/00/Vladimir_Putin_and_Barack_Obama_%282015-09-29%29_08.jpg

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/moscow-live/33462979018>

www.kremlin.ru

https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%B9%D0%BB:Putin_and_mitropolit_Kirill.jpg

https://m.vk.com/wall-59885381_8841

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D0%9F%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA%D1%83_%D0%B1%D1%8B%D1%82%D1%8C_%D0%9C%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B6%D1%8C_%D0%BD%D0%B5_%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B3%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%81%D1%8C_%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%BD%D1%8F_%D0%B8_%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B0_%D0%94%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%8C_%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE_%D1%84%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B0.webm

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 formed a new reality for Russia, bringing about significant changes in the socio-political life of the country. The totalitarianism and ideology of the Soviet era were briefly replaced by liberalisation, democratisation, and economic reforms. The country began to look for a new national identity and strategy in the new geopolitical conditions.

Russia entered the 21st century with a new president, Vladimir Putin. Putin's rule marked a new era in the history of the Russian state. Under the guise of strengthening state security and national stability, the regime gradually began restricting democratic freedoms, persecuting political opponents, and taking control of the media, inexorably transforming it into a gigantic propaganda machine.

It took Russia twenty years to travel the path from hopes for freedom to authoritarianism, restricting democratic freedoms, infringing human rights, revising history, and starting invasive wars.

1. Revising the geopolitical agenda

A reassessment of events and a revision of historical narrative became a clear tendency in Russian government policy from 2005, when, in his annual address to the nation, Vladimir Putin called the collapse of the Soviet Union the “greatest geopolitical disaster” of the 20th century. The collapse of the USSR was indeed accompanied by tragedies and numerous conflicts, but Putin was not interested in the humanitarian aspect of events. For him, the geopolitical aspect was important, namely the loss of control over former Soviet territories, redistribution of spheres of influence, and access to management of resources (Akopov, 2020).

With this historical assessment of the collapse of the Soviet Union, President Putin set a fundamentally new trajectory of the country's socio-political dynamic.



President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin during his address at the 43-rd Munich Security Conference in February 2007. Credit: Antje Wildgrube / commons.wikimedia.org
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Msc_2007-Saturday,_09.00_-_11.00_Uhr-Wildgrube042_Putin.jpg

Another important moment for understanding Russia's geopolitical ambitions was seen at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. Putin spoke out against the established unipolar world, announcing that the economic growth of developing nations would inevitably be converted into political influence (Putin, 2007).

Putin's statement about multipolarity clearly indicates the Russian leadership's wish to change the existing world dynamic, which Putin believes was set to a considerable degree by Western powers.

2. The hostile West

The gradual shift in Putin's rhetoric towards a wary attitude to the West took place at the same time as the so-called colour revolutions (the collective name for revolutions that took place in the early 2000s in former Soviet republics).

The Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, followed by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004–2005) and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005) were perceived by the Kremlin as a threat to its exclusive influence in these countries, which were once part of the Soviet Union. Additionally, the Kremlin began to fear the spread of colour revolutions which could provoke civil disobedience within Russia and challenge the existing political system (Umland, 2012).

Following the Soviet tradition of concern over military threats and expansion of the West, the Russian regime began to pursue a more hostile policy towards Western countries, while accusing them of organising and sponsoring colour revolutions in the post-Soviet region.

Putin's rhetoric regarding the West turned from wariness to open hostility. **The designation of the West as an "external enemy" not only embodies the evolution of Russia's geopolitical positioning but is also used by the state as a tool for consolidating Russian society.**

The Kremlin increasingly attempted to restore the influence which Russia had in the Soviet period. The declaration of a unique "independent path of development" for Russia became the starting point for a long-standing confrontation between Russia and the West with its liberal values.

3. Hunting down dissidents: the attack on rights and democratic freedoms

The regime's fear that colour revolutions, which led to destabilisation of the situation in other countries, could also occur in Russia became one of the key factors in forming Putin's political strategy.

The Russian government's concerns were not unfounded. In late 2011, Moscow was shaken by large-scale protests under the motto "For honest elections". The mass protests that drew 50.000 to 120.000 people, according to various estimates (Kheifets, 2021), united representatives of various opposition groups, and were society's response to the falsification of elections to the State Duma.

In May 2012, the wave of protests grew into a major anti-government demonstration in Moscow, disputing the legitimacy of Putin's return as president. To discredit the protestors, the regime accused them of collaborating with the West, portraying them as "national traitors" (Lipman, 2015). In the same year, the Russian authorities passed the law on foreign agents, which marked the beginning of a campaign to regulate both the activity and liability of protestors and opponents of the regime.

In subsequent years, the law on foreign agents was systematically expanded and supplemented with new provisions to restrict the activity of non-governmental organisations. For example, the register determining the status of a foreign agent came to include media that received foreign financing, and foreign media itself (2017). This allowed the regime to take greater control of the information space and significantly limit the activity of independent media and its influence on public opinion. Gradually, the definition of "foreign agent", which initially only applied to organisations receiving financing from abroad and taking part in political activity, came to include "individuals carrying out the function of a foreign agent" (2020), which allowed the state to increase control over the activity of individual citizens.

The new "umbrella" law on foreign agents entered into force on 1 December 2022. This law expanded the limits for defining the category of "foreign agent", making it possible to put everyone in this category (including individuals) who received support from abroad or who were "under the foreign influence" in various forms, even if they received no foreign financing. According to data from the Ministry of Justice, as of 1 September 2023, there were 674 entries in the register, including individuals previously removed from the register of foreign agents (OVD-Info, 2023).

In the ten years since the first law on foreign agents was passed, amendments were regularly made that increased punishment in the form of fines and criminal prosecution for breaking the requirements of the law.

Parallel with the attack on Russian civil society, the state began hunting down foreign and international non-governmental organisations, and in 2015 passed the law on undesirable organisations “representing a threat to the foundations of the constitutional order of the Russian Federation, defence capability or security of the country”. In 2021, this law was amended, intensifying control over the activity of organisations declared undesirable. Since then, a ban has been introduced for Russian citizens on participating in undesirable organisations not only in Russia, but also abroad. Violation of this ban is a criminal offence. As of 1 September 2023, 107 organisations have been included on the “undesirable” list (OVD-Info, 2023).

Ideologically motivated propaganda has announced a “crusade” against all liberal forces in the country.

4. The role of the Orthodox Church in legitimising the regime and its actions



Credit: freepik.com

https://ru.freepik.com/free-photo/people-attending-sermon-in-church-in-celebration-of-greek-easter_38673198.htm#query=%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%8F%20%D1%86%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%8C&position=24&from_view=search&track=ais

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the scientific atheism promoted by the state ceased to be an essential part of Russians’ convictions. In the first two decades after the collapse of the USSR, the number of Russian citizens belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church increased significantly, from 31% in 1991 to 72% in 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2014). Under the constitution, Russia is a secular state, and incorporating religion in secular structures is against the law (Liparteliani, 2020). Previously limited, the involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church in matters of the state has risen drastically in the past decades.

Since the 2010s, the Russian Orthodox Church has played an increasingly prominent role in the life of Russian society. Closer ties have been established between the Orthodox Church and state institutions, filling the ideological vacuum that formed after the collapse of the USSR.

The mass protests in 2011–2012 forced Putin to seek the support of the Orthodox Church in uniting society and ensuring the legitimacy of his third presidential term. Patriarch Kirill gave a high assessment of the president's actions in overcoming the crisis of the 1990s and establishing close relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, calling them a “miracle of God” (Novikova, 2012). The Orthodox Church greeted Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012 with enthusiasm. **This marked the time when the rhetoric of the Russian Orthodox Church became synchronised with the rhetoric of the Kremlin. The Orthodox Church has settled down to a course of legitimisation of the ruling regime's domestic and foreign policy.**

The regime regards religion as a consolidating force in society, which can provide spiritual mentoring and support for its members. Cooperation between the state and the Orthodox Church is intensifying, laying the way for it to become the state religion (Uran Kyzy, 2020).

The engagement of the Orthodox Church in political matters takes place parallel to its increasing involvement in the Armed Forces. In agreement with the Ministry of Defence, the Orthodox Church is beginning to revive its traditions in Russian military units and works to motivate soldiers to defend the Fatherland. On the 1st of December 2009, the post of commander's assistant for working with Orthodox soldiers was established, to which priests are appointed. The newly created institution is funded by the state treasury. To coordinate work with religious soldiers, a department for working with religious soldiers was created under the Ministry of Defence (Pchelintsev, 2011). Sanctifying missiles, spaceships and nuclear weapons is becoming an increasingly widespread practice (Luhn, 2019, Bennetts, 2015 in Uran Kyzy, 2020).

5. In search of lost values. Traditional values as the spiritual foundation of the nation

With the goal of preventing the West's influence on Russian society and its further consolidation and unification, the Kremlin began to look for a national idea that could serve as the “spiritual and moral foundation” of the nation. The regime chose “traditional values”, which are one of the pillars of the Orthodox religion. National discourse became central in the ideology that Putin proposed for the consolidation of Russian society. Religious values became an integral part of the Russian system of values (Basic Principles of State Cultural Policy, 2014).

The National Security Strategy until 2020 (National Security Strategy, 2015) sets out clear priorities, putting moral standards above material goods, and calls any revision of Russia's traditional values a fundamental threat to the nation's security. **Traditional values are declared to be the foundation of national identity, existence, and sovereignty (TASS, 2023c). Protect-**

ing these values is deemed to be a priority and becomes a universal justification for any actions by the regime in both domestic and foreign policy.

In 2022, President Putin signed the executive order approving “The Fundamentals of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values”. The document names key traditional values such as dignity and freedom, patriotism and civic spirit, spirituality and family values, the continuity of generations, and collective historical memory. The Russian Orthodox Church, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism are described as part of the country’s historical and spiritual heritage and playing a fundamental role in forming the traditional values of the peoples of Russia. The achievements of the Orthodox Church in strengthening traditional values are given special mention.

The activity of unfriendly Western nations, along with extremist and terrorist organisations and foreign non-governmental organisations is seen as undermining traditional values and constituting the main threat to Russia’s national security.

6. “We will build our own Russian world”. The new ideological platform as a justification of the State’s domestic and foreign policy

United with the Orthodox Church in the campaign to protect Russian traditional values and discredit the liberal values of the West, the Kremlin developed the concept “Russian world”, which became one of the main political narratives of official Russia. The concept revolves around the community of Russian and Russian-speaking people in Russia and abroad, unified by a common cultural code, spirituality, language, and mentality.

The first step to building the “Russian world” was made on Putin’s initiative in 2007, when the Russian Orthodox Church was merged with Orthodox churches outside Russia, as a result of which over 1 million Orthodox believers in 30 countries came under Moscow’s control (Kolodiy, 2022).

In recent decades, the Russian government has invested enormous funds in forming an alternative worldview among the population, based on the “National idea” (1999) concept, which rests on four key components: *patriotism, a strong state, social solidarity, and the national idea* (Putin, 1999).

The new ideological platform began to be widely used by the state to legitimise its domestic and foreign policy, and after the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of part of the Ukrainian territories in 2014, it was also used to legitimise Russia's expansionist foreign policy.

In September 2022, Putin signed a new doctrine, "Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad", which closely coincides with the concept of the "Russian world" and defines Russia's interest in the humanitarian sphere beyond the national borders. It stresses that Russia's main goal is to protect traditional values and prevent the spread of Western neoliberal values. The doctrine does not permit a reconsideration of the history of World War II and emphasises the urgent need to oppose this revision. Cooperation with former members of the Soviet Union is declared to be the priority of the Russian humanitarian strategy.

Although the document describes Russia as a country with diverse cultures and languages, it focuses particular attention on the need to popularise the Russian language and Russian culture.

The doctrine stipulates the state's readiness to protect the interests and identity of Russians and Russian-speaking citizens abroad. **The narrative of discrimination of compatriots abroad is intended to serve as a justification for the Kremlin's aggressive foreign policy.**



Russian House of Science and Culture in Berlin, 2021

Credit: Yury / commons.wikimedia.org

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russisches_Haus_in_Berlin_2021.jpg

7. The demand for greatness

63%

of Russian citizens regret the collapse of the Soviet Union

48%

of respondents would like to restore the USSR

The collapse of the USSR, reforms and subsequent disappointment in them, the new geopolitical reality and challenges, and the need for a national identity – all of these led to an increase in feelings of “nostalgia for great power” in Russian society.

According to a public survey conducted by the “Public Opinion” Foundation in the winter of 2022, 63% of Russian citizens regret the collapse of the Soviet Union, and 48% would like to restore the USSR (Foundation “Public Opinion”, 2022).

The legacy of the USSR is an important but not always officially articulated part of state ideology in modern-day Russia. Since the early 2000s, a policy was taken to rehabilitate the Soviet legacy and incorporate the history of the USSR in the common narrative of Russian history, as a consequence of which Russian textbooks and the media give high assessments of both Lenin and Alexander III, for example. At the same time, the aspect of state violence in Russian history began to be hushed up and justified (Malinova, 2021). The revision of history was reflected in state and public practices, which virtually affirmed that executioners and victims were equal.

The main tool for assessing historical events and figures became the state and its interests.

The USSR is interpreted as a form of state existence of Russia, and Soviet expansionism is included in the description of the revival (return, preservation) of imperial and state greatness. Mass culture constantly uses Soviet and quasi-Soviet images in advertising, pop music, television etc. Nostalgia for the USSR, which is understood as “Great Russia”, is fuelled and supplemented by the rhetoric of “rising from our knees”, which was actively introduced into public discourse in the early 2000s. **At the same time, Putin’s Russia is portrayed as the only region that stays faithful to the Soviet Union, despite the total betrayal of the republics (which were deceived by the West). The historical realities of the collapse of the USSR are completely ignored.**

The regime’s aspiration to win back the status of a great power for Russia, the idea of Western countries being hostile, and traditional values that consolidate the national idea have become central in Russian political narratives.

According to Putin, Russia’s national idea should include society’s aspiration to national unity, which goes beyond the present borders of the Russian Federation, and rather encompasses the borders of what Putin calls “the historical Russian lands”.

8. Patriotism and militarisation of society

Nostalgia for great power and signs of militarisation of society have their roots in the first years of Putin's rule. Soon after his inauguration, Putin began focusing society's attention on Russia's long history as a victorious country (Borshchevskaya, 2020).

The motivation for restoring the "victorious" status of the country was the main driving force of Putin's policy. The army and law-enforcement structures became important tools in realising national ideas and geopolitical ambitions. An analysis of 3.500 biographies of members of government, deputies, and members of the presidential administration conducted by the Department for the Study of the Elite at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences showed a high presence of representatives with military background (up to 70%) in various state institutions (Kryshtanovskaya, 2003).

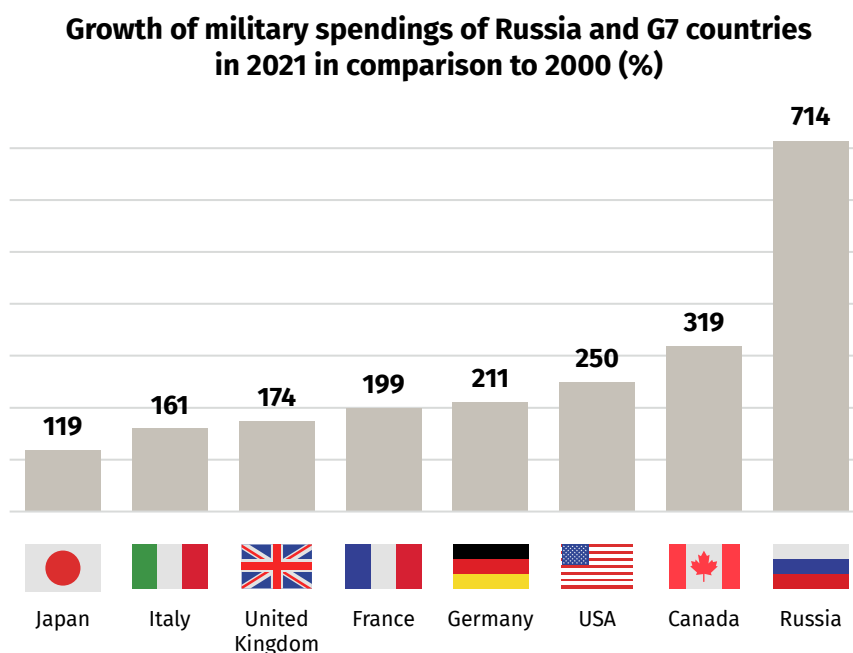


Yunarmiya cadets
<https://t.me/yunarmiya/4803>

The priorities for financing military expenses began to clearly emerge after the war in Georgia in 2008 – a short war that had serious geopolitical consequences and was Russia's first military operation outside its own territory. After the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of the eastern territories of Ukraine, a significant growth in Russia's military expenses was observed. According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in the first two decades of Putin's rule Russia's military expenses increased from USD 9.23 billion in 2000 to 65.9 billion in 2021 (SIRPI, 2021). In 2020 military expenses accounted for 4.26% of GDP, one of the highest figures in the world (SIRPI, 2021).

The ideological vacuum left after Russia abandoned its communist ideology forced the Kremlin to look for a new national idea. Patriotism, the idea of “Russia's rebirth as a great power”, religion, and traditional values became the main “ingredients” of this new ideological cocktail.

“Patriotism” is a multifaceted concept, in which the key component is love for one's country, identification with it, and loyalty to it. The ultimate way that people can show this love is through their readiness to defend the Fatherland with weapons in their hands (Vinogradova et al., 2016 in Ozhiganova, 2019).



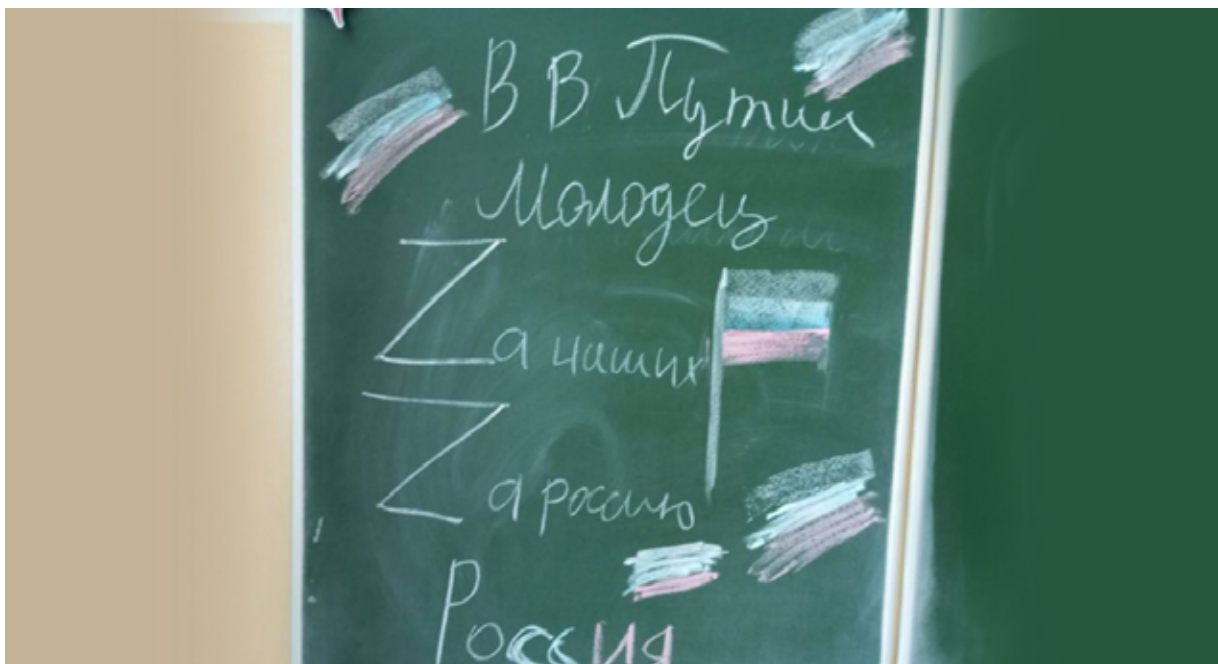
Source: SIPRI, 2021

<https://faridaily.substack.com/p/-20->

The modern concept of patriotism in Russia echoes the one that existed in the Soviet period if one disregards the Soviet emphasis on communist convictions and ideals (Lassila, 2022). Putin took on patriotism in its Soviet form and developed it further, and now offers a renewed type of patriotism as the main pillar of Russia's national unity (Kangaspuro and Lassila, 2017 in Lassila, 2021).

The legacy of Russian history has to a large degree enabled the majority of Russians to accept Putin's thesis on the hostility of the outside world. A sociological survey conducted by the Levada Center in 2021 showed that 83% of respondents believe that the country is surrounded by enemies. These respondents regard the state as the defender of Russia (Levada Center, 2021).

Exploiting these moods in society and opposing Western values with traditional ones, Putin played the card of "state patriotism", based on claims of Russia's uniqueness and justifying ambitions to restore Russia's status as a great power.



A drawing submitted by school students in a frame of a national competition

The text reads: "V. V. Putin is great, For our people, For Russia. Russia"

Source: Telegram channel of Ekaterina Mizulina, member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, Head of the Safe Internet League

The League has developed video lessons on internet safety, which serve as didactical materials for the Yunarmiya movement.

https://t.me/ekaterina_mizulina/5473?single

SECTION II.

Reforms in Russian secondary education



Secondary school No. 41, Kazan

Credit: Engelberthumperdink / commons.wikimedia.org

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:School_41,_Kazan_%282021-09-13%29_02.jpg

1. Federal state education standards

In the era of transition in the 1990s – early 2000s, the education system in Russia underwent considerable changes. In this period, society and education experts were highly interested in innovations in this field. It was interest and personal initiative, rather than state policy, that was the driving force in changes in the country's education system. The unprecedented freedom for teachers in applying professional practices led to a drastic increase in innovative methods and approaches. Innovative teachers began to unite in a national movement. In their manifesto, "The Pedagogics of Cooperation" they stressed the importance of such principles as ensuring cooperation between teachers, students, and parents; comprehensive personal and professional development; and self-governance. However, with a lack of structural reforms, there was no common understanding of innovative approaches in different regions (Froumin and Remorenko, 2020).

From the early 2000s, the state began to engage actively in the education domain. The first step on this path was the development and introduction of Federal State Education Standards (FSES).

The first education standards were adopted in 2004. Although the emphasis remained on the content of each subject, the standards contained a detailed description of the topics to be mastered for each subject and each level of education (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation No. 1089, 2004). The education standards also referred to skills required for living and functioning in the 21st century, and a competency-based approach.

At this time, private schools and schools with experimental programmes also began to appear, but they accounted for a very small percentage of the main bulk of secondary schools.

Although the first FSES did partially reflect modern approaches to education, including elements of civic upbringing in accordance with world standards and universal human values, in the vast majority of schools Soviet traditions and teaching methods were sustained. There were a number of reasons for this, such as a deficit of new teaching staff and the widespread idea in society that the Soviet education system was the finest in the world. The Russian school system remained repressive in its educational practices.

The second generation of Federal State Education Standards was passed in 2010. They were developed due to the need for further regulation of education and training of educators capable of competing on an international level. A focus on academic achievements was at the core of the second-generation education standards. The nurturing aspects of education were based on traditional attitudes – patriotism, kindness, a healthy lifestyle, and family values (Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation No. 1897, 2010). Developing skills of cooperation, effective communication, critical thinking, and the ability to solve problems did not find significant reflection in the 2010 education standards.

Implementation of these standards was mainly left to the politicians and scientists, while teachers and parents were not properly involved in the process of their elaboration and

integration. This non-inclusive approach led to a lack of mechanisms for policy implementation and infringement of schools' autonomy (Froumin and Remorenko, 2020). Despite attempts to update education policy in accordance with international standards, all planned changes remained "on paper" – due to a lack of mechanisms for their implementation.

Although expected outcomes were included in the standards, no pedagogical tools were proposed to achieve them. **This did not allow the Russian school and teacher training system to move away from the practice of Soviet-era school education (Bermus, 2022).**

Federal State Education Standards of the third generation were passed in 2021 and entered into force in September 2022 (Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 287, 2021). In the new FSES, patriotic, labour, and environmental education are specified as mandatory. A second foreign language ceases to be compulsory in schools, and the emphasis on studying a first foreign language (usually English) is shifted towards learning about the history and culture of Russia.



Drawing submitted by school students in a frame of a national competition

Drawings present patriotic slogans such as "For Russia"

Source: Telegram channel of Ekaterina Mizulina

https://t.me/ekaterina_mizulina/5345?single

The new FSES also introduced provisions for the digitalisation of education. Digital instruction has become a compulsory component of school education at all levels. The standards highlight the teacher's role as a facilitator, not as a disseminator of knowledge, and emphasise the value of developing cognitive, emotional, and social skills. The FSES-2021 stress that the learning process should be focused on developing the entire personality of the student.

The importance of the culture of lifelong learning is also reflected in the third-generation education standards. The standards also note the importance of developing student self-governance and schools' cooperation with civil society organisations for the achievement of learning outcomes.

In September 2022, the new FSES for secondary schools entered into effect. The document provides a detailed list of requirements for education content and outcomes that students should achieve by the time they complete their studies.

In compliance with the new standards, the curriculum underwent considerable changes.

The new education standards provided the normative framework for the development of a national schooling system that aims to revitalise the glory of the Soviet school system (Kravtsov, 2023).

The period since 24 February 2022 is characterised by a major set of changes in school practices, declared at the level of legislative and executive power. Many decisions are chaotic in nature and closely correlated with the political environment. There is a clear tilt towards the notion of the "Soviet school" traditions in the modern education system. In fact, such references to the traditions of Soviet schooling conceal uncertainty; many legislative initiatives contradict the spirit if not the letter of the education standards that were passed only recently.

2. Changes in the teaching of history

Since the late 1990s, the state once more began to emphasise its leading role in determining the policy for instilling civic spirit, to create a feeling of loyalty to the Russian state, and not to its subnational culture (Piattoeva, 2005).

"The reason for problems of state construction of Russia is its separation from some of its historical territories and peoples" – this is the narrative that the regime offers to conceptualise the process for instilling civic spirit. In an article published in 2012, Putin noted the crisis of the multicultural approach to governance, which gives too much attention to rights and ignores obligations (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 2012). He contrasts this allegedly failed multiculturalism with "civic accord", which lays the foundation for the unity of the Russian state.

Example of history curriculum for students from 1st to 11th grade

Grade	History Thematical Sections	Course Hours
1 The person and society as part of “The world around us”	Our Homeland is the Russian Federation: symbols of Russia (coat of arms, flag, anthem). Peoples of Russia. First information about the native land	16 (The person and society) of 66 hours of “The world around us”
2 The person and society as part of “The world around us”	Our Homeland is the Russian Federation. Russia and its capital. Separate historical events connected with Moscow. Russia and its peoples. The Homeland and significant events in its history	16 (The person and society) of 68 hours of “The world around us”
3 The person and society as part of “The world around us”	Our Homeland is the Russian Federation: Society. State symbols. Peoples of Russia. Countries and peoples of the world	20 (The person and society) of 68 hours of “The world around us”
4 The person and society as part of “The world around us”	Our Homeland is the Russian Federation: the Constitution. Rights and obligations. The president is the head of state. Administrative-political map. Native land. History of the Fatherland	33 (The person and society) of 68 hours of “The World Around Us”
5	Ancient history	68
6	Medieval history Medieval history of Russia: from Rus to the Russian state	23 45
7	History of the 16 th –17 th centuries Russian history of the 16 th –17 th centuries: from the Great principality to Tsarist Russia	23 45
8	History of the 18 th century Russian history of the late 17 th –18 th centuries: from Tsarist Russia to empire	23 45
9	History of the 19 th – early 20 th century The Russian Empire in the 19 th – early 20 th century	23 45
10	World history in the early to mid-20 th century History of Russia in the early to mid-20 th century	136–140
11	World history from 1945 to the present day The history of Russia since the Great Patriotic War	136–140

Source: website of the Federal Institute for Developing Education Strategy

https://edsoo.ru/Primernaya_rabochaya_programma_osnovnogo_obschego_obrazovaniya_predmeta_Istoriya_proekt_.htm

Putin emphasises the role of the state in forming the idea of civic spirit in the Russian context and does not mention the role of civil society in shaping Russian civic values.

In this understanding, the civil accord is a result of patriotic education, which emphasises obligations and collective responsibility. According to Putin, aspiration for national unity should be the cornerstone of the national idea. The boundaries of the “national” are however not determined by the present borders of the Russian Federation, but Putin’s understanding of “historic Russian lands”.

In the rapidly ideologized Russian education environment, history teaching plays an important role in forming Russian civic identity and cultivating national patriotism. The history course is blatantly used in the state’s interests, didactic tasks play a secondary role, and it is asserted that history should nurture patriotism.

In compliance with education standards, teaching history begins in the first year. Primary school students get historical education as part of the subject “The world around us”. Additionally, ideological indoctrination of students is conducted through “Important Conversations” – a compulsory weekly extracurricular lesson.

History as a separate course is introduced from the 5th grade and continues until the final school year (11th grade). For students of the 10th–11th grades, an additional, optional course “Russia – my history” is offered.

Public history. Narratives and interpretation

Promoting the officially approved version of history is another important direction in modern Russian education policy.

In the sixth grade, students usually learn about the history of the Eastern Slavs. The study material for sixth graders emphasises the common origin of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, and the similarity of their languages and cultures. This context reflects the regime’s narrative of brotherhood and the common cultural code of the Eastern Slavic peoples. This long-standard claim inherited from Soviet times is combined neatly with the concept of the “Russian world” promoted by the regime. It would seem that in the future this narrative will be developed further and will be reflected even more strongly in history teaching in the Russian education system.

The Russian history course in the school curriculum remains colonial at the core, filled with discourse about the constant expansion of territories. Although the Russian school curriculum does not mention the imperialist nature of the Russian state, it cannot avoid colonial themes, as the entire historical narrative is built on “expansion of territories” and “annexation of lands”, i.e. territorial expansion. To admit that Russia is a colonial empire means contradicting the official position. So, the word colonisation is omitted in history textbooks. Storylines that are quite colonial in their content are described extremely vaguely as “expansion of territories”.

The state is central in the Russian school history curriculum. In the last two decades, the entire historical space has been monopolised by state-related topics. The federal standards are clearly oriented towards the need to form strong empathic links with the historical past.

History turns into the language of politics and is used for propaganda purposes.

Two important events take a significant place in school education standards: the Russian Revolution of 1917 (and the subsequent civil war) and the Great Patriotic War, a term preferred to “World War II” in the Russian state narrative.

The new history programmes also focus on the “wild nineties” (the 1990s) – another important historical narrative that propaganda has used to increase support for the Russian authoritarian regime. The drastic contrast between the “wild nineties” and the “stable 2000s” (2000s) was skilfully constructed and exploited by the Russian authorities to persuade the population that changing the existing order would only lead to economic troubles, poverty, and a weakening of Russia’s position in international relations (Malinova, 2021).

The 2000s, when Putin came to power, are described as a “renaissance” in the new school education standard. The economic growth, due to rising oil and gas prices, is associated with “order”.

Ignoring historical events

Many historical events such as the Holodomor (The Great Famine of 1932–1933 in Ukraine) orchestrated by Stalin’s regime, taking the lives of millions of people, are missing in the new Russian history curriculum and rarely taught in Russian schools (Federal Law No. 472-FL, 2022).



The first exhibition on the crimes of the Stalin regime, possible due to „Perestrojka“, took place in November 1988 at the club of Moscow electric lamp factory.

The exhibition was titled „Week of Conscience“

Credit: Dmitry Borko / commons.wikimedia.org

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wall_of_sorrow_at_the_first_exhibition_of_the_victims_of_Stalinism_in_Moscow.jpg

Stalin’s domestic policy is portrayed in a balanced manner in textbooks – mass repressions are carefully counterbalanced with economic success, the greatness of the state, and most importantly victory in the Great Patriotic War. Descriptions of the heroic deeds of the Soviet army leave no place for any mentions of the dark chapters of the war – on the frontline and in the rear (guard divisions, deportations of ethnic groups, sufferings of the civilian population).

Stalin’s foreign policy is described as peacekeeping before, during, and after WWII. The continuing occupation of Eastern and Central Europe by the Soviet army after the end of the war is not discussed.

An interpretation of history that goes beyond the official narrative is regarded as a national threat.

Other countries' interpretations of the events of the 1920s–1950s are termed by the Russian authorities as “falsification of history” (Korostelina, 2014). To address “falsification” two state commissions were created: the Commission to Combat Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests (2009–2012) (RIA News, 2009) and the Commission for Historical Education (2021) (Glikin, 2021). The first commission focused on finding factual errors in textbooks. The current Commission for Historical Education works on promoting specific historical narratives. This is implemented not only through history textbooks but also through media and art. These narratives stemmed from Putin's recent articles in which he focused attention on the “sacred mission” of the Red Army in World War II (Putin, 2021a).

Since 2021, it has been prohibited to compare the goals, decisions, and actions of the USSR with those of the regime of Nazi Germany. It is also unlawful to deny the “decisive role of the Soviet people in defeating fascist Germany” and “the humanitarian mission of the USSR in liberating European countries” (Petrov, 2021). Putin's statements stress that the Russian authorities do not accept any interpretation of the history of the Great Patriotic War apart from the official one. These official narratives are not only part of state propaganda but also form a legal basis for detecting people who disagree with the official interpretation of history.

Promoting state narratives through teaching history undoubtedly has an influence on young people in Russia. A survey conducted in 2018 showed that young people regard the role of the Soviet Union in World War II very positively and describe its importance in official rhetoric. The collapse of the Soviet Union is mainly regarded negatively, while the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, officially called a “reunification”, is assessed positively (Krawatzek, 2021).

The authors of the report “The Distant Close War”, prepared by the Laboratory of Public Sociology (Alyukov et al., 2022), note the numerous historical references in the argumentation used by supporters of the “special military operation (SMO)” in Ukraine. These references are based on one principle: if Ukraine did not have its own statehood until the 20th century, then it does not have it now either; if Russia once had conflicts with the West, that means that this confrontation continues today. This is an example of total anti-historicism, denying the very possibility of any significant historical dynamic.

Reconstructions of the past which are presented in the school history course are portrayed as the only possible and objective options. No reflection about what constitutes a “historical fact” is permitted, just as there is no discussion of cause-and-effect relations and their probability in social sciences. The content of the material taught raises many questions as to why political rather than social aspects are emphasised, and why some historical subjects are described in detail and others are ignored.

Ignoring these complex methodological problems means that students at Russian schools receive a complete narrative about the past which they are not inclined to doubt. Hence the constant public dissatisfaction over the fact that “history keeps being rewritten” (a com-

pletely normal situation for any social science), and the widespread conviction that history can be written once and for all.

The priority of ideology over the objective portrayal of material and didactic methods is illustrated by the significance that Crimea holds in the history course. The history of the Crimean Peninsula and the circumstances of Crimea's "inclusion" in the Russian Federation is taught in all classes. A key component of the new curriculum emphasises the annexation of Crimea as a central element of Russia's national revival as a great power (Teper, 2016 in Krawatzek, 2021). Instilling a certain ideological position here is more important than objectivity and teaching and learning methods. **This way of teaching history makes it impossible to analyse the material from different viewpoints and hinders the development of critical thinking in students.**

The occupation of Ukrainian territories and recognition of the so-called Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), as well as their accession² as integral units to Russia, will apparently also become part of the new curriculum. A topic about the "special military operation (SMO)" in Ukraine has already been included in the updated study programmes.

The new tendency to erase the existence of Ukrainian history and any references to it in the Russian school history course is clearly noticeable in the new Russian curriculum. In new textbooks, Ukraine is mentioned in strict accordance with the common state practice: the name arises in the 17th century, is preserved until the second half of the 18th century, and then once more appears in the description of events in 1917. **Ignoring the objective history of Ukraine is directed towards casting doubt on the legitimacy of Ukraine as an independent nation, squeezing the Ukrainian historical context into a distorted Russian discourse.**

The unified state exam for history and social studies

The parameters and list of topics for the Unified State Exam (USE) for every subject are determined by a codifier, indicating the topics that should be focused on when preparing for the exam. **If the codifier does not include certain topics, this means that knowledge of them is not a priority and will not be tested in the exam.**

The history exam for graduates, like many other aspects of the Russian education system, has undergone certain changes. For a considerable period of time, the history exam was not influenced (or barely influenced) by the political situation. It did not include facts relating to the period after 1991.

The examination tasks, according to the new requirements, attach great importance to testing students' knowledge and their ability to analyse and systemise information, find a correlation between cause and effect, and give well-founded arguments. The federal education standards prescribe indicators (descriptors) to assess the level of students' mastery of historical material.

² The Council of Europe: Recognition of the so-called 'people's republics' of Donetsk and Luhansk by the Russian Federation is in violation of international law and represents a unilateral breach of the Minsk agreements.

The history of the Great Patriotic War traditionally holds an important place in examination questions on history. Great attention is also given to issues that can determine students' understanding of the causes and consequences of the collapse of the USSR. More and more, the focal point of Russian history revolves around events occurring since the early 1990s. Less room is given for topics from "old times" such as pre-war and inter-war history.

Russia's revival as a great power also holds a central place in exam questions. Particular attention in the historical discourse is given to the topic of Russia's annexation of Crimea.

It is planned to include material on the "special military operation" in Ukraine in examination questions (Kravtsov, 2022 in Saprygina, 2022). The co-author of the study guide for preparing for the USE history exam, Andrei Oshchepkov, has listed the exam questions concerning the topic of the "special military operation". They include questions on the causes and consequences of Russia's annexation of Crimea, worsening relations with the West, and the beginning of the "SMO"; examinees must provide at least three causes (Oshchepkov, 2023). The guide publishes the "right answers" to these questions. For example, one of the main causes for the annexation of Crimea is stated to be its "irrational" inclusion (by Khrushchev) in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Pazin and Oshchepkov, 2023). One of the reasons for Russia's invasion of Ukraine is said to be the mythical violation by NATO countries of verbal (!) promises not to expand to the East and not to permit countries of the former USSR to join NATO (Pazin and Oshchepkov, 2023). The consequences of the "SMO" are described as economic (restrictions of markets for selling oil, freezing of Central Bank currency reserves) and geopolitical (Sweden and Finland joining NATO), without any mention of the enormous destruction and numerous victims of the war. At the same time, Oshchepkov (Pazin and Oshchepkov, 2023) suggests that it is unlikely maps of the "SMO" will be included in the exam, as military operations are still continuing.

All these shifts in the teaching of history signify a prevailing trend – the "modernisation" of Russian historical discourse is aligned with the political interests of the governing regime.

An analysis of the codifier for the social studies USE-2024 exam revealed a lack of such important topics as "democracy", "civil society and state", and "international law", which were present in codifiers of previous years (Mediazona, 2023). **Excluding these topics and concepts from the codifier may limit students' understanding and assessment of the nature of democratic processes and their role in modern society, and ultimately have a detrimental effect on their activity as citizens and participants of public life.**

3. School history textbooks

The first attempts at revising history textbooks to align their content with a unified historical narrative began in the early 2000s. The request for this revision came from the Russian president after the publication of the textbook “National History. The 20th century” edited by Igor Dolutsky, which contained what the authorities deemed to be “disputed” questions (Walsh, 2004). After an inspection, Dolutsky’s textbook was banned. However, the federal register of textbooks for 2004–2005 still contained a considerable number and variety of books (Kriuchkova, 2005).

To avoid ambiguous interpretations of key historical events, in 2013 Putin initiated the concept of a new *single* textbook on Russian history. To review the content of Russian history education, new educational and methodological guidelines were developed known as the “Historical-Cultural Standard”.



One of the meetings of the Council of the Russian Historical Society, 27th of February 2013

[Kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24896602](https://kremlin.ru, CC BY 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24896602)

On the 30th of October 2013, the Russian Historical Society Council approved a document that outlined assessments of historical events and set out appropriate approaches to teaching history in school. The document presented an updated list of recommended topics, concepts, terms, and figures, and also a number of controversial topics that raised heated discussions in society: “Stalin’s rule and repressions”, “USSR policy before the Second World War”, “the Soviet Union in the cold war period”, “Brezhnev’s rule and the dissident movement”, “Economic reforms of the early 1990s”, “Yeltsin and Russia in the 1990s”, “Economic recovery and political stabilisation of the 2000s”. Since that moment, all history textbooks have been inspected to ensure their content complies with the historical and cultural standards of teaching history.

In 2014, the general director of the Centre of Political Information Alexei Mukhin presented the report “On Problems of Teaching History in Education Institutions in Russia”, where he concluded that school history textbooks undermine students’ faith in the stability and power of Russia, and serve to strengthen separatist tendencies and nationalistic ideology (Podosenov, 2014).

Over the following two years, the Russian Historical Society headed by State Duma speaker Sergei Naryshkin developed guidelines for the new unified historical content of future school textbooks.

In 2015–2016, three different publishers presented their versions of modified and “correct” textbooks. Although the books differed in certain nuances, all three of them preferred to present more “neutral” historical narratives, avoiding such words as “occupation” and “expansion” in connection to the cooperation between the USSR and Germany in 1939 (Chevtava, 2015).

According to the new requirements, the basis of the new textbooks was a linear method of teaching, when more complex and controversial issues of Russian history are studied at a later stage. The majority of Russian schools moved to the linear system of teaching history in 2019.

A working group for educational and methodological issues of the Russian Historical Society analysed and summarised the results of this transition and proposed an elaborated version of the Concept for teaching history. The updated concept was passed by the Ministry of Education in October 2020.

In accordance with this document, the linear principle of teaching history should be applied in school grades 10 and 11. The course “Russia in the World” lost its compulsory status in the curriculum but may be taught in classes with an in-depth study of humanitarian subjects.

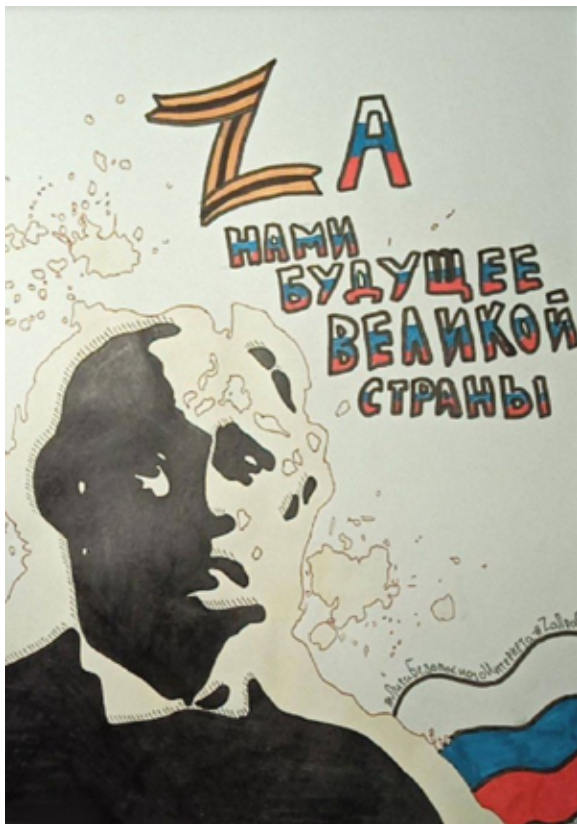
The **historical-cultural standard** holds a central place in the Concept of the New Educational and Methodological Guidelines on National History. Particular attention in these standards is given to issues of the Great Patriotic War, namely the Nazi occupation, Nazi propaganda, and Nazi crimes against the Soviet people (Concept of the New Educational and Methodological Guidelines, 2020).

The content of Russian textbooks has certain features which concern the perception of the past formed in Russian students, and provide possibilities for state manipulation of the past.

The extensive content of the course and the excessive amount of factual material in it can be explained by many specific circumstances: some things were included in the programme in the process of removing blank spots and the historical rehabilitation of the 1990s, and some individuals were included in the list of historical figures under pressure from regional elites. This diversity of the historical “menu” has two important consequences.

Firstly, the huge amount of material practically rules out its critical contemplation by students, supporting anti-historical tendencies. Teachers barely have time simply to convey all the elements proposed by the standard. The material is easily transformed into comprehensible schemes that are easy to learn. Additionally, it becomes possible to draw analogies that are not always correct from the scholarly standpoint.

Secondly, the breadth of the history curriculum also means a depth of the reserve of accumulated memory. In case of political need, a useful “memory” can be extracted from the “archive” of school history and put on the register of functional memory. The coverage of the curriculum is such that it can satisfy any political order: from liberal-democratic to totalitarian.



Drawing submitted for a national art competition
The text reads: „The future of the great country depends on us“

Source: Telegram channel of Ekaterina Mizulina
https://t.me/ekaterina_mizulina/5476?single

Victoriousness is another characteristic of the representation of historical material in textbooks. Events and wars in which Russia was defeated or did not achieve significant results are absent from the curriculum – for example, Elizabeth Petrovna’s decree “On the extermination of warlike Chukchi” (practically a decree on genocide), the search for Joao-de-Gama-Land, the wars on Alaska, the attempt to capture Hawaii and others (Kopitsa, 2023). The textbooks do not mention these events, because they illustrate cases when Russia was defeated or did not achieve its goals (or not immediately and not in full measure) – to annex territories.

The division of the curriculum into national and world history which is traditional for the Russian school sets a mode of exclusivity. As a result, key events in Russian history are perceived by students as unique simply because they have no reference in students’ minds: they are not correlated or compared with anything external. At best, they are given universalist labels, which is especially clear in the section of the course concerning culture; culture transfers are postulated, but not studied, and adaptation mechanisms are not even considered.

Very little time is given to the study of world history, and it is clearly insufficient to cover the entire spectrum of historical themes. The propagated narrative that Russia “is one of a kind”, means that appeals to the historical experience of other countries (both successful and tragic) are met with a minimal response in the minds of Russian school graduates.

The present historical narrative in schools inherits the narrative set out in Nikolai Karamzin’s work “History of the Russian State”, but the transfer of the narrative is not direct. The first single imperial textbook for high schools focused on the “triune Russian nation” (Karamzin, 1997), while the Soviet version of school history was all about class struggle and the Communist Party.

The monopolisation of the entire historical space with state themes only took place in the last two decades, when the regime had no more “binding ties” left in its arsenal except ones relating to the state. Thus, the school returned to Karamzin’s narrative. *The history curriculum quite blatantly pushes the idea that the individual and collective existence of Russians*

has always depended on the “well-being” of the state. Hence the attention to the sources of Russian statehood and its metamorphoses, and the need to study an enormous number of reforms, focusing on historical figures who are associated in any way with the state, even if this is a negative association (sociological surveys show that citizens of the Russian Federation are more inclined of taking pride in “statesmen” and prominent figures of science and culture, the former much more than the latter).

This excessive fixation has a predictable effect: the majority of citizens of the Russian Federation simply have no one they can trust apart from the state and their family members. The state patriotism promoted through the history curriculum inspires a similar attitude to both institutions. It is this **state-centrism that is portrayed in Russian textbooks as patriotism.**

The patriotic component is an integral part of history education and is considered critically important for civic spirit, designed to form national civic identity and belonging to society among young people. History teaching in Russian schools is designed to shape young people so that they come to identify the state’s actions with their own (Soroka and Krawatzek, 2021).

In August 2023, the Ministry of Education presented a new unified textbook on world history and the history of Russia for the 10th and 11th school grades. The co-authors of the textbook were the former minister of culture Vladimir Medinsky and the rector of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations Anatoly Torkunov. The sections covering the period from the 1970s onwards were completely rewritten. Mikhail Gorbachev and his policies are blamed for the collapse of the USSR, and the era of the 1960s is called a “revolution of prosperity”: “The gradual development of the economy combined with achievements of science and technology in the 1950s–1970s made our country one of the most influential powers in the world. The Soviet Union reached unprecedented heights” (Medinsky and Torkunov, 2023). Soviet citizens’ dissatisfaction with their lives is explained by the image that was created by Western media: “The level of everyday comfort attained in cities still differed from the lives of “ordinary people” in developed countries of the West, or rather from the image created by foreign cinema and magazine advertisements” (Medinsky and Torkunov, 2023).

The chapter on the perestroika³ period commences by quoting Vladimir Putin, who said that the collapse of the USSR was the “greatest geopolitical disaster” of the 20th century. Gorbachev is blamed for the outbreak of nationalism in the second half of the 1980s. “One of the main areas of democratisation of the political system launched by Gorbachev was the creation of [...] “national fronts”. These were usually led by representatives of nationalist and separatist organisations”, the textbook claims (Medinsky and Torkunov, 2023).

The textbook contains a new section covering events from 2014 to the present day, including material about the “special military operation” in Ukraine. The textbook claims that “the destabilisation of the situation inside Russia” became a fixation for Western countries; this is supplemented by photographs of heroes of the “special operation” and quotes from Putin’s speeches. The textbook contains many propaganda clichés and is a continuation of the propaganda shown on TV and other media.

³ A political reform movement within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) during the late 1980s widely associated with CPSU general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and his glasnost (meaning «transparency») policy reform (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perestroika>).

The new textbook gives an assessment of Ukraine as an ultra-nationalist state, where any dissidence is harshly persecuted, the opposition is banned and everything Russian is declared hostile. The author writes that “forming civic identity and patriotism among students” is the core to outlining historical material in the new unified textbook (Medinsky and Torkunov, 2023).

The latest developments in the field of history teaching show that it is ideologically charged and serves to spread official narratives intended to cultivate loyalty towards the state, and thus to ensure social cohesion.

4. Patriotic education

In recent decades, patriotic education has become an important and integral part of state policy and an aspect of achieving Putin’s goals of “state patriotism”. In documents on state patriotism, this latter aspect is seen as the core spiritual component of Russia and the foundation of Russian statehood. These concepts are laid out in the Strategy for the Development of Education in the Russian Federation in the Period Until 2025 (2015).

In the Russian system of education, upbringing is given the main role in cultivating patriotism and the loyalty of the growing generation to the state.

The state began to invest actively in patriotic education in the mid-2000s when the mass movement “Walking Together” was replaced by the democratic youth anti-fascist movement “Ours” under the patronage of the presidential administration. Vasily Yakemenko, the ideologist of this movement, announced that the main goal of the movement was “fighting fascism in all its manifestations” (Politov, 2005).

By 2010, this pro-governmental movement united over 200.000 young people. In the state’s increasing role in initiating and controlling the youth movement, one may see the aspiration to avoid further colour revolutions and oppose the opposition (Ishkanian, 2007). In 2012, the movement fell into decline – a rift took place in the organisation, and most of its projects were shut down, which eventually led to its dissolution.

A growth in patriotic military sentiments in Russian society was seen in 2014 and was closely connected with the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of the eastern territories of Ukraine. Since that time, Russia has officially moved beyond civic education and entered the field of patriotic military education (Lassila, 2021). The document “Patriotic Education of Young People in the Russian Federation: State, Relevant Problems and Areas of Development” was passed by the Federation Council in 2014. It lists the main patriotic military requirements promoted by the state in the Russian education system. These requirements emphasise the priority of students’ loyalty over their active participation, consensus over pluralism, duties over rights, and collective identity over individual identity.



2nd Congress of the movement „Nashi“, 2006

Source: *Nashi-2.0*. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=20007307>

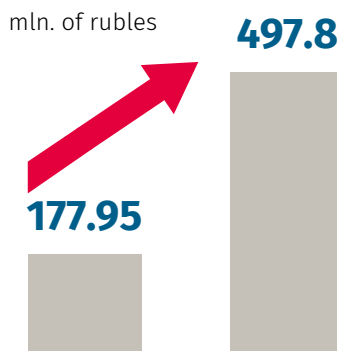
The aims of patriotic education are also reflected in general education standards. According to the current curriculum for mainstream education, the school has the goal to nurture a graduate “who loves their Homeland, respects their people, its culture and spiritual traditions”, “who recognises and accepts the traditional values of the family, Russia’s civil society, multi-ethnic people of Russia and humanity, acknowledges their involvement in the destiny of the Fatherland” – in short, who accepts the destiny of the Fatherland.

The new standards that have been in force since September 2022 describe civic identity in the patriotic education component of the curriculum. The civic identity of the student is now inseparable from the concept of state patriotism.

Huge funds from the budget are directed towards patriotic education. From 2011 to 2015, the budget of federal programmes to develop patriotic education increased by almost three times – from 177.95 million roubles (around USD 3 million at the exchange rate for 2011) to 497.8 million roubles (around USD 8 million) (Patriotic Education Programme, 2015).

Since the beginning of the full-scale military operation in Ukraine, the state has significantly increased expenditure on “forming patriotism” among citizens under the national project “Education 2030”. From the explanatory note to the 2023 budget and the planned budget for 2024–2025, it follows that in 2023 the funds allocated to lessons of military propaganda, pur-

Increase in expenditure on patriotic education from 2011 to 2015



chasing accessories, and supporting children's "patriotic" camps amount to 6.478 million roubles. According to the budget, this sum will increase by six times in 2023 and come to 39.706 million roubles (Letter of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation No. 15-07-10/61612 dated 28.06.2022). In 2024 it is planned to increase this sum further by 13%, to 44.327 million roubles.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine gave an additional stimulus to patriotic education in education institutions. Since September 2022, extracurricular activities have been widely introduced, such as the so-called "Important Conversations". The develop-

ment of topics and the selection of methodological materials for these activities are centrally managed. This is another tool in the ideological moulding of the younger generation.

Along with quite neutral topics, such as the history of the "Knowledge Day," celebration or the importance of respecting the elderly, these "conversations" also touch on topics directly relating to the war (the "special military operation", as it is called in Russia). They contain justifications for the military invasion, and in a number of cases have all the signs of military propaganda: the demonisation of the enemy, numerous evaluative judgments, and ideological labels (Fascism, Nazism) to describe Ukraine.

Researchers note the militarist nature of state patriotism, which is illustrated by the key role played by the Ministry of Defence in developing and lobbying the project of patriotic education and specific measures recommended for schools (Piattoeva, 2010). Education has become an issue of national security. The primary civic virtues have begun to correspond to military ones: selflessness, loyalty, and responsibility (State Programme "Patriotic Education of the Citizens of the Russian Federation" 2001–2005; 2006–2010; 2011–2015; 2015–2020).

5. Militarisation of civic education

Patriotic military education is gradually expanding its boundaries beyond education institutions. Outside the school, patriotic education is promoted by the agency of military – sports camps for young people. In 2019, there were 4.780 camps with a patriotic agenda in 78 regions of Russia, which involved 21.6% of the young population of Russia (Babich, 2019). Among the organisers of these summer camps are state national and regional public organisations, commercial structures, and the Orthodox church, together with Cossack organisations.



Yunarmiya cadets. Military-patriotic game „Girls with epaulettes“

<https://t.me/yunarmiya/4691>

Despite the general patriotic themes, these camps also have their own specific nature. For example, the Russian Historical Society organises youth camps with a historical military focus. Such camps with a focus on military training, sports and recreation emphasise patriotic military education and training young people for future military service, and also the comprehensive and all-round development of the character of the future defenders of the Fatherland, their abilities and readiness to fulfil their civic duty and constitutional obligations to defend the interests of their Homeland in peace and wartime (Ministry of Sports, Tourism and Youth Policy of the Russian Federation, 2011).

Another tool for forming civic values based on traditions, patriotism, and readiness to serve the Homeland, is cadet and Cossack classes. Education in such classes has a strong military-historical and patriotic focus and is coupled with training of military practical skills.

The Russian education system has three types of cadet organisations – education institutions with full board and lodging, boarding schools affiliated with departmental institutions, and cadet classes in general education schools.

In recent years there has been a high interest in studying in cadet classes. For example, in the frames of the project “The cadet class in the Moscow school” which was launched

almost ten years ago, the number of students at cadet classes in Moscow schools has increased by more than three times, from 8.500 students in 2014 to 27.000 in 2023 (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2023).

The period since the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of the eastern territories of Ukraine was marked by a “renaissance” of the Cossack movement and a significant growth in the number of Cossack classes. According to the portal “Russian Cossacks” (2022), at present, there are over 1.935 schools with the status of Cossack organisation or with separate Cossack classes in Russia.

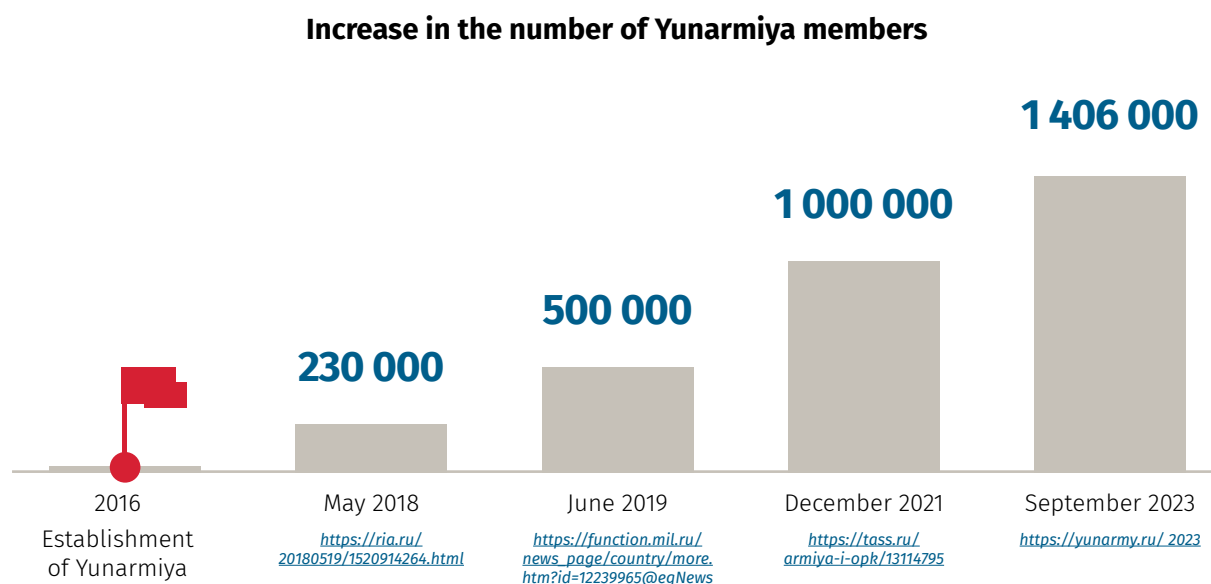
Cossack schools (data for September 2022)

Type of education institution	Number of education institutions	Number of classes/ groups	Number of students
Organisations with the official status of a “Cossack educational organisation”	407		95 187
Organisations with separate Cossack classes and (or) groups	1528	6467	115 686

Source: “Russian Cossacks” website
<https://kazachestvo.ru>

The militarisation of civic education was further reflected in the creation of the Yunarmiya (Youth-Army) – a military-patriotic movement for children and youth, officially registered in 2016 at the initiative of the Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu. The movement was supported by state military organisations and representatives of the ruling party. The countrywide child and youth (from 8 to 18 years old) military patriotic movement grew rapidly, and by December 2021 already numbered 1 million members (TASS, 2021). Since the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine, the Kremlin has increased investments and intensified work with children and youth particularly through working with kindergartens. Since then, the number of Yunarmiya members has almost doubled, reaching over 1.406.000 people (Yunarmiya, 2023).

Yunarmiya positions itself as a promoter of patriotic values, a social elevator, and a platform for self-realisation. The organisation’s website offers a wide range of educational materials, essentially propagandistic in nature, for history teaching, with an emphasis on military affairs and achievements of the Soviet period. Given the minimal financing of extracurricular education activities (interest groups, sports clubs etc.), Yunarmiya presents an attractive alternative for young people. The organisation does not experience difficulties with funding and human resources.



Yunarmiya actively recruits military retirees, who play a significant role in supporting the ruling political regime. They act as supporters and advocates of the ideology that represents a specific blend of pro-state and nationalist convictions and is regularly conveyed to the teenage audience at public and private events. According to Anna Borshchevskaya (Borshchevskaya, 2020), the involvement of youth in military-patriotic education aims to instil the regime's ideology in young people while simultaneously fostering a sense of belonging. In a context of increasing repression and restrictions on freedom of speech, Yunarmiya has become a powerful instrument for the ideologization of youth, especially in provincial towns and rural areas.

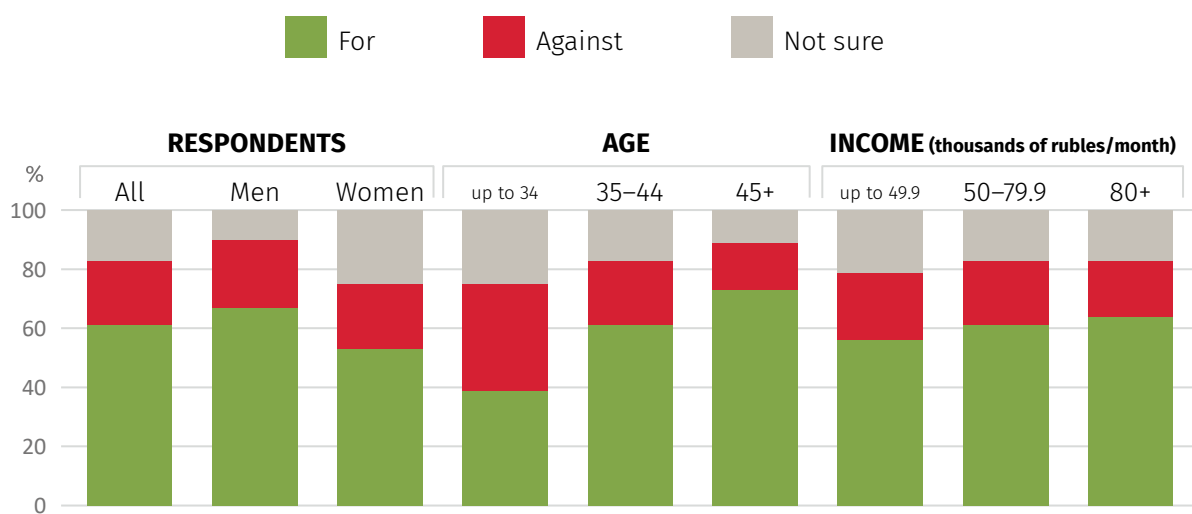
The gradual militarisation of civic education and upbringing is proceeding in line with the overall militarisation of Russia's society. This tendency is not only characterised by the incorporation of military-patriotic aspects into extracurricular activities but also into the curriculum.

Topics connected to patriotism and military-patriotic education gain additional relevance through the introduction of the "Ready for Labour and Defence" (RLD) programme at schools – a standard programme of physical training which develops physical fitness, discipline, and readiness to defend the country. The RLD programme was devised in the Soviet period and intended for participants from 10 to 60 years of age. First introduced to the Soviet school education system in 1931, the programme was running in education institutions for over 60 years, until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Scholars argue that the aim of the RLD programme was to enhance military aspects in physical training, in order to increase the country's defence capabilities (Sosnina, Fischeva and Ulyanova, 2018).

The revival of the RLD programme was initiated by Vladimir Putin in 2014 as a tribute to national historical traditions, with the goal of engaging citizens in regular physical fitness activities (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, 2014). Since autumn 2022, there have been active discussions about expanding the list of mandatory sports disciplines in RLD to include grenade throwing, firing a pneumatic rifle, and drone operation (Alshaeva, 2022).

In addition to the RLD programme, the subject “Initial Military Training” (IMT), which was an integral part of the Soviet school system from 1922 until the early 1990s, is being reintroduced to the curriculum. The return of military education to the present-day curriculum was met with considerable public support. According to the most recent surveys, 67% of parents whose children study in senior classes, vocational schools, and colleges support this initiative, and only 22% oppose it (Superjob, 2022).

Results of a survey of parents of Russian students on the introduction of an initial military training course in upper secondary school



Source: Research Center of the Superjob.ru website

<https://www.superjob.ru/research/articles/113751/vvedenie-v-uchebnuyu-programmu-kursa-nvp-podderzhali-2-iz-3-roditelej-podrostkov>

An analysis of a sociological study shows that men show a greater interest in the introduction of initial military training in schools (67%), while the proportion of women supporting this idea is lower (53%).

The older age group (from 45 years of age and older) is the most supportive of the idea of IMT (73%). Youth (up to the age of 34 years), on the other hand, were more opposed to this idea (36% opposed). This may indicate differing perceptions of the importance of military training among different age groups.



Yunarmiya cadet against the backdrop of a poster with a Hero of Russia

<https://t.me/yunarmiya/4695>

Regardless of socio-economic status, the majority of respondents are in favour of introducing the military training course into the school curriculum. The percentages opposed with incomes of 50.000 rubles and over 80.000 rubles are 23% and 19% respectively.

Although opinions concerning the introduction of IMT to the curriculum differ depending on gender, age, and socio-economic factors, the majority of respondents support this state initiative.

This year the IMT course will be taught as part of the school subject “Fundamentals of Life Safety”. From 1 September 2024, according to the resolution of the State Duma, the course will be titled “Fundamentals of Safety and Defence of the Fatherland”. Within the framework of the new course, students will be acquainted with the role of defence for the peaceful socio-economic development of the country (Kravtsov, 2023), and learn about the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. As part of the course, girls will be offered the opportunity to study the basics of medical training.

With increasing emphasis on military-patriotic education, a transformation of labour education in line with the state’s needs to enhance its defence capabilities is also taking place. According to amendments to the Federal law “On Education in the Russian Federation” (2012), a ban, on engaging minors in labour without parental consent, has been lifted. Currently, the law states that students from the age of 14 years must participate in socially ben-



Yunarmiya cadet. Target shooting round in a military-sporting game
<https://t.me/yunarmya>

eficial labour, in addition to labour lessons included in the mandatory school curriculum. Engagement of students in socially beneficial labour is to be carried out within the framework of labour legislation (Federal Law No. 479-FL, 2023).

In general, trends in the Russian education system illustrate a transformation from “soft patriotism” in the Soviet period to “military patriotism” which has taken shape since 2014 (Lassila, 2021). “Soft patriotism” in the Soviet school was often combined with elements of patriotic military education. As tension in relations with the West grew, elements of military patriotism increasingly came to dominate in the Russian education system. “Soft patriotism” gradually transformed into “military patriotism”, which bears a great similarity to the patriotism of the Soviet period (Lassila, 2021).

6. Religious education in schools

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian government faced the task of finding an alternative to education based on communist moral values. As atheism ceased to be the predominant belief system, many denominations and religious communities began making efforts to regain their former influence, opening religious (Sunday) schools and other outreach education institutions.

The federal law “On Education” of 1992 proclaimed the secular nature of education in Russia, thereby limiting the activity of religious schools in education institutions of all levels. However, the Federal law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations” passed in 1997 permits organisations affiliated with religious denominations to teach religion in state schools, but not as part of the core curriculum. This opened the door for addressing the gap in moral education in schools, for both secular and religious groups (Glanzer, 2005).

The demand to make moral education systematic and stable led to numerous discussions in the late 1990s, focusing on the need to incorporate moral education into the school curriculum.

In 2000, a new edition of the Federal Education Development Programme, which emphasised the need for the renewal of an effective system of upbringing for the younger generation, was adopted. Spirituality, patriotism, and values were established as priorities in the spiritual and moral system of coordinates.

In 2001, the Programme for the Development of Upbringing in the Russian System of Education was adopted (Resolution of the Federal Government of the Russian Federation No. 122, 2001), marking a turning point towards a more centralised system of moral education. Instilling general human values and strengthening Russian values were the basis of moral education. Nevertheless, in this document, the Russian Orthodox Church was not considered as a source of such education (Glanzer, 2005).

Changes began taking place in 1999 when the Ministry of Education and the Russian Orthodox Church agreed to create the Coordinating Council – a permanent body designed to develop and coordinate joint efforts to strengthen the spiritual and moral aspects of the education system.

Two years later, the newly developed course “Orthodox Culture” was ready for inclusion in the main school curriculum as an elective subject. Researchers say that this course **legitimised the denominational approach to religious education in schools of the Russian Federation rather than proposing the culturological approach which corresponded to the principle of the secular nature of education (Kozyrev and Fedorov, 2006).**

Although there is an increasing tendency to appeal to the Orthodox Church as an authority, debates about the content and forms of religious education at school continue. The textbook “The Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” by Alla Borodina, recommended by the Coordinating Council for Religious Education, received a mixed reception and caused further debates.

To resolve these disputes, the Ministry of Education created a workgroup to develop the elective course “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture”. The result of the working group’s efforts was the opportunity for religious groups to implement lessons on religion in schools on a voluntary basis, provided they obtained permission from municipal authorities and the consent of parents and children. The course drew large interest and was taught as an elective subject in many Russian regions, reaching 430.000 students – 70% of the total number of school-children in Russia (Zhukova, 2003).

An analysis of the implemented activities shows a tendency for increased cooperation of state education institutions and authorities with the Orthodox Church. The cooperation was assessed as constructive and was further developed.

**Positive evaluation of the course
„Fundamentals of Spiritual and Moral Culture
of the Peoples of Russia“**
(according to the 2021 social survey data)

Parents	88%
Teachers	94%
School Leaders	93%
Authorities	91%

Dynamic in the teaching of Orthodox culture in regions of the Russian Federation

Region/ Oblast	2005–2006 Number of students	2006–2007 Number of students	2012 % of students	Activities implemented
Kaliningrad	3000	10 000	53%	Activities are carried out regularly by Orthodox representatives at the Center for Religious and Moral Education and Upbringing of the Kaliningrad Oblast Institute for Education Development
Kursk	no data	45 000	75%	The course “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” has elective status and is taught at all schools from the 1 st to the 11 th grade. Over 1.000 educators have received training on how to teach the course. The training was led by Kursk State University
Kostroma	no data	no data	72.1%	A religious studies group is active at School 51. High school students are offered courses in religious education
Pskov			60%	An agreement on cooperation between the State Education Department of the Pskov Oblast and the Pskov Diocese is established. Methodological associations of teachers of Orthodox culture and Centres for religious and moral upbringing are being created
Rostov		1700 students study various religious courses	68.4%	Active cooperation of education institutions and the Orthodox church is ongoing. A methodological centre for Orthodox education has been established. A parents' assembly was held for persons of Orthodox faith and a parents' committee was elected. Joint events are planned to support teaching the fundamentals of Orthodox culture
Sverdlovsk	no data	no data	17.9%	The Institute for Education Development organises training for teachers on Orthodox culture. A commission has been created for teaching religion and culture. Priests have held meetings with school administrations and parents
Smolensk	no data	9000 were taught an Orthodox module	46.8%	An agreement has been established on cooperation between the regional administration and the Orthodox Church
Tyumen	no data	no data	20.2%	An agreement has been established on cooperation between the regional administration and the Orthodox Church
Vologda	no data	no data	34.3%	The Orthodox Church actively implements extracurricular activities and establishes practices of cooperation between the school and the church
Lipetsk	no data	no data	41%	30 schools have established agreements with 30 churches

Source: “Vera i Vremya” (Faith and Time) website
<http://www.verav.ru/common/mpublic.php?num=1549>

In 2007, the Ministry of Education and Science published a letter outlining the model of cooperation between education authorities and the Russian Orthodox Church. According to the terms of the agreement, the aim of such cooperation was to shape, among students, a holistic worldview, in which the Orthodox religion is regarded as an essential component of both Russian and world culture (Letter of the Ministry of Education and Science No. 03-1584 dated 21.05.2007).

In 2009, the Concept of Spiritual and Moral Development and Character Education of the Russian Citizens was passed, stating the modern national civic ideal – a citizen who respects traditional values, and cultural roots, embraces and shares the fate of their Homeland. Although the goals of this concept were not explicitly defined, they, nonetheless, were reflected in the second generation of the Federal State Education Standards (FSES) for primary general education.

In 2009–2010, the course “Fundamentals of Spiritual and Moral Culture of the Peoples of Russia” was launched and tested in 21 Russian regions. The results of the trial period demonstrated the effectiveness of the course and its significant impact on the moral development of the students. A conducted sociological survey showed that the course was positively evaluated by 88% of parents, 94% of teachers, 93% of school administrators, and 91% of representatives of executive authorities (Website Grot-school.ru, 2021). The respondents emphasised that the course contributes to the development of inter-ethnic and inter-religious understanding among students, and promotes respect for the cultural and religious traditions of the various peoples of Russia (Website Grot-school.ru, 2021). Respondents also highlighted the importance of strengthening moral education in schools and welcomed closer cooperation between various stakeholders, including the government, schools, families, civil society organisations, and religious institutions.

As a result of certain changes, in 2012, the course was given a new title “Fundamentals of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics”. Students and their parents were offered the option to choose one of the course modules according to their preferences:

- Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture
- Fundamentals of Islamic Culture
- Fundamentals of Buddhist Culture
- Fundamentals of Jewish Culture
- Fundamentals of World Religious Culture
- Fundamentals of Secular Ethics

Analysed data showed that 41.7% of parents chose “Fundamentals of Secular Ethics”, 21.5% “Fundamentals of World Religious Cultures”, 32% “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture”, 4.2% “Fundamentals of Islamic Culture”, 0.57% “Fundamentals of Buddhist Culture” and 0.05% “Fundamentals of Jewish Culture” (Muravev and Shahovich, 2012).

Despite the elective nature, in practice, the choice of the taught module was often made by the school administration and religious authorities based on the available resources

(Ozhiganova, 2019). For example, in several regions (Ryazan, Tambov, Rostov Oblasts etc.) almost all students studied “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture”. Religious minorities frequently had to join the majority in studying religious culture (Köllner, 2016), which assisted in the promotion of Orthodox culture. Even though the course (34 hours) was mandatory in the frames of the curricula, religious education was still not regulated at the federal level. Although the Orthodox Church voiced the wish for centralised teaching of the course, the state was not eager to take further action.

Over the years, there has been a growing demand for the reinforcement of moral education within the school system. The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (2021) emphasises the importance of character development, calls for an in-depth teaching of national historical, cultural and traditional values, and underlines their role in countering the spreading of Western values.

According to the new FSES (2022), the course “Fundamentals of Spiritual and Moral Culture of the Peoples of Russia” gains the status of an independent subject (previously it was taught as a part of another subject) and becomes mandatory in grades 5–9. The Order of the Ministry of Education No. 568 outlines the main teaching and learning aims of the subject: students should understand the contribution of the peoples of Russia to the development of the country’s unique heritage, foster a respectful attitude to national ethnic values, and the religious sentiments of various peoples of Russia, comprehend the importance of maintaining interethnic and interreligious accord (Order of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation No. 568 dated 18.07.2022). However, it should be acknowledged that there is a risk of using state narratives about traditional values in the teaching of the subject to reinforce a certain political agenda.

In the last decades, the Russian Orthodox Church has firmly established itself in both the political and social discourse. The State sees significant potential in religion for addressing the challenges of educating the younger generation and contributing to their character development. Spiritual and moral education is regarded as an “instrument for constructing post-Soviet Russian identity”, with the aim of consolidating society through socialisation by instilling traditional societal values and norms in the younger generation (Ozhiganova, 2019).

7. The Russian language and the school for export

The promotion of the Russian language and the establishment of Russian schools abroad holds immense significance for the Russian state in the context of strengthening the “Russian world”.

The foundation for developing these schools is based on the concept “The Russian School Abroad” (2015), approved by President Putin. Its implementation involves such federal bodies as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science and others. Due to the involvement of many stakeholders, a well-coordinated system has been established, directed towards supporting and promoting the Russian language and culture abroad.

Traditionally, a large number of Russian-language schools are located in former Soviet republics, where the language has not completely lost its influence. For example, in Kyrgyzstan (Class News, 2023), of the total number of schools (2.333) over 10% (247) have instruction in Russian (Class News, 2023). Starting this year, Russia plans to build another nine new schools in Kyrgyzstan, with a capacity of 1.200 students each.

The Russian state invests considerable funds in building new schools in the post-Soviet region. In 2022, over 6 billion rubles were allocated to building and equipping five Russian-language schools in Tajikistan (Class News, 2023). Russia is also negotiating with Armenia, Azerbaijan and other countries on opening general education institutions with instruction in Russian.

In late June 2023, the State Duma passed a Decree proposing that the Russian government expedites the construction of education institutions, where teaching will take place in Russian, in member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Lapshin, 2023). The document also stresses the need for the training of pedagogical personnel capable of teaching in Russian and the development of unified educational textbooks.

To address the staffing issue related to teaching Russian outside of the Russian Federation, the project “Russia’s Teacher Abroad” was initiated in 2017. This project provides Russia’s educators with the opportunity to teach Russian language abroad. Participants of this project, besides direct teaching activities, organise various cultural and educational events to promote the Russian language and culture.

More teachers join the project every year. In the 2022/23 academic year, 379 teachers taught Russian language and general subjects in Russian in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam, Mongolia, Serbia, Uzbekistan, and Turkey. In the current academic year, over 600 Russian teachers will teach pupils in Egypt, China, Venezuela, and Cuba (RIA News, 2023b). Talks are also underway with the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina on developing education in Russian with the aim of further promoting the Russian language and culture in the Balkans.

At present, there are 27.000 Russian education institutions operating outside Russia (schools, interest clubs, centres for extracurricular activities etc.), where the Russian language is taught or other activities and subjects are provided in Russian (Dolgosheva, 2023).

In general, the establishment of Russian schools abroad is an important component of the concept of the “Russian world”, which strives to expand its sphere of influence to the 112 million Russian speakers living outside Russia (Russkiy Mir Foundation, 2023). Along with promoting Russian language and cultural values, narratives of state policy are also promoted, creating opportunities for political manipulations, shaping specific attitudes, and expanding Russia’s influence beyond its borders.

8. An alternative to Russian state programmes

At the same time, there has been an increase in various education programmes which were founded or further developed by educators and education experts who decided to leave Russia after the war with Ukraine began.

The development of initiatives in non-formal education and larger projects related to establishing new schools outside the Russian Federation can be attributed to a combination of factors. On one hand, such developments are driven by the potential and expertise of teachers and other educators who have relocated and wish to continue their significant educational mission. Many of those who relocated were involved in creating leading schools in Russia such as “New School”, the European High School, “Letovo”, “Intellectual”, the Vernadsky Grammar School, “White Crow”, “Orange” and so on. On the other hand, the development is driven by the demand from parents and students for a modern education based on democratic and humanistic values that would allow students to seamlessly continue their studies in Russian while simultaneously learning the language of the host country.

In Montenegro, since Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine, there has been a considerable rise in the number of Russian citizens who left their country because of their anti-war and anti-Putin stance. The demand for continued education in the Russian language led to the rapid development of the “Adriatic” school network in the cities of Bar, Herzeg Novi and Podgorica, which in the second year of the full-scale war have become independent educational establishments. In this academic year (2023/24), the Adriatic School in Podgorica opened its doors to 160 students who will receive education following the IPC and IMYC international programmes. All the schools in the Adriatic network are developing capacity to accommodate a larger number of students. In 2023–2024 the schools in Bar and Herzeg Novi plan to welcome 250–300 students. In 2025 the network plans to expand the number of schools to 6–8, and the total number of students to 2.000.

A growth in the number of Russian-language schools that provide an alternative to Russian state education can be observed in all countries where citizens of the Russian Federation, opposing Putin's policies, have relocated. In Armenia, for example, the Free School was founded, while in Georgia the number of students at the "Projector" school has increased rapidly and the Democratic School was established (Shtein, 2023). In Cyprus, a new international school called The Island was created, with plans to accommodate up to 1000 students by 2024.

It is important to note that many schools see their mission not only in creating conditions for the successful integration of students but also in providing support to education professionals who have relocated to other countries by offering them job opportunities and possibilities to continue their professional careers (Shtein, 2023).

Such schools outline community development as one of their core missions, with the school playing a key role in enhancing ties between the school team, parents and local communities. In several cases, schools successfully cooperate with Ukrainian civil society organisations abroad.

All schools listed above declare their commitment to humanistic and democratic values and underline the importance of developing the competences necessary for students to thrive in the contemporary global world. These formal and informal education institutions play an important role in promoting education that is an alternative to the education system in Russia. The content of their curriculum, free from Kremlin narratives, and the use of modern didactic materials and methods promote the development of critical thinking, civic values, and prepare students for active participation in the life of society.

SECTION III.

Higher education in Russia in the 21st century.

Prospects and intermediary results



Main building of Moscow State University. View from Berezhkovsky Bridge

Credit: Nickolas TitkovFollow / [www.flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/titkov/15400609093)

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/titkov/15400609093>

Changes in the socio-political life of the country that have taken place in the three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union inevitably left their mark on the system of higher education in Russia.

1. Higher education in Russia in the 1990s–2010s: the legal foundations of international cooperation and professional mobility

Higher education in the Soviet Union was relatively accessible for millions of Soviet citizens (Ibragimova and Frants, 2021). The Soviet planned economy required many new specialists to function. After completing their studies, graduates were allocated to factories and other enterprises according to the needs of the economy (allocation refers to the employment of graduates of higher education institutions and vocational education and training institutions for a certain period of time; this practice was mandatory for both the graduates themselves and the employers, and it guaranteed employment for young specialists).

At the same time, the quality of higher education in the Soviet Union remained questionable. Only certain Soviet political “elites” had access to the best education opportunities. The shortfall was particularly pronounced in humanities, which were highly ideologized. For decades, Soviet science was isolated from international scientific progress, and ideology drove the development of all scientific disciplines (Morgan and Kliucharev, 2012).

In the 1990s, the demands of the market economy, integration into global competition and the new political regime brought radical changes to the system of higher education in Russia.

The first Russian federal law “On education” adopted in 1992 permitted the establishment of private education institutions. Twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of universities doubled. In 2010 there were 1,115 higher education institutions, 41% of which were private (Project Media, 2018). Private higher education was a profitable business in the 1990s, as most citizens of Russia considered higher education a necessary condition to gain status and higher incomes (Ibragimova and Frants, 2021). Certain independent education institutions became centres for the revival of disciplines that were under ideological pressure during the Soviet period, in particular social sciences, and humanities.

The federal law “On Education” of 1992 proclaimed (article 2) freedom and pluralism in education, as well as democratic management of education institutions. Marxist-Leninist ideology, which had dominated Soviet higher education and science, ceased to be a requirement for passing exams, receiving an academic degree at a university or publishing research articles. Furthermore, the requirement to be a member of the ruling Communist Party for a successful university career lost its significance.

In 1992 Russia adopted the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education, which created opportunities for international exchange and cooperation.

The first federal law “On Higher and Professional Education” (1996) also asserted (article 3) the autonomy of universities and academic freedom for their employees. Universities gained independence in decisions concerning their personnel, scientific and economic activity. Lecturers and scholars received the right to teach subjects and conduct research at their own discretion. In 2000, the state introduced qualification standards for each programme of professional education, for bureaucratic streamlining of the education sphere.



Soviet-era poster. Artist Gustav Klutsis

The text reads „Raise the banner of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin!”

<https://garystockbridge617.getarchive.net/amp/media/klucis-vyshe-znamya-marksa-engelsa-lenina-i-stalina-ba36ea>

Due to a lack of funding for education reforms, in the late 1990s, Russia began accepting financing from the World Bank (Crowley-Vigneau, Baykov and Kalyuzhnova, 2020). The use of funds from international institutions entailed the implementation of reforms that complied with international education systems both in structure and content. Additionally, decision-makers were required to ensure that the country would not fall behind in the competitive globalised economy. Therefore, other steps were also taken to integrate the international experience into Russian higher education.

One of the tools for integrating international educational practices was the standardised exam, which was intended to contribute to the provision of equal opportunities for students and improve the quality of higher education, by enhancing the selection process of students for admission in higher education institutions. In 2001, in several regions of Russia, the unified state exam was introduced on an experiential basis. This exam, based on the American SAT system, was designed to solve problems of corruption and inequality in university admissions, as it proposed uniform standards, for all schools and universities in the

country, to measure students' academic achievements (Crowley-Vigneau, Baykov and Kalyuzhnova, 2020).

In 2003, Russia joined the Bologna process, which aimed to create the European Higher Education Area, to facilitate mutual recognition of higher education degrees and professional mobility (Erasmus+, 2017). The system introduced three main cycles of higher education: bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies, as well as common academic credits (points) for the number of hours spent on each subject. The reform was designed to make it easier for Russian students to apply for studies abroad, and for foreign students to study at universities in Russia.

While requirements of donors related both to the form and content of education, the state simply reproduced international standards in Russian realities without any involvement of stakeholders in the implementation process.

Both innovations were quite controversial and drew a negative reaction from students, teachers, parents and university staff (Erasmus+, 2017). Many claimed that these changes ruined the quality of education in Russia. These discussions fuelled the myth of great Soviet education which had been ruined by unsuitable Western approaches.

In 2012, the new Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" was adopted. It still serves as an important legal benchmark for education standards in Russia, including the field of higher education. Society was actively involved in the development of the law. In 2010, a website was launched to discuss the main provisions of the law and proposals for its improvement.

The law institutionalised reforms and developed provisions concerning the rights and obligations of the main participants of education and education processes (article 3). It should be noted that the Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" of 2012 created relatively liberal conditions for education activities in Russia.

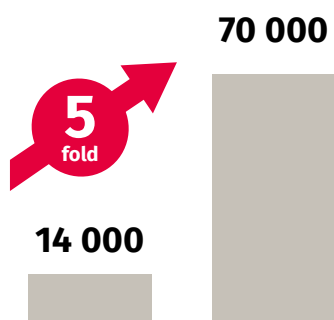
2. 2010–2023. A rise in issues unresolved by legal reforms: corruption, lack of democratic mechanisms, and political repressions

The new reforms did not resolve persistent problems in Russian higher education. Existing issues, such as corruption and low level of management competence, continued to erode Russian higher education from within. With the introduction of the unified state exam, corruption did not disappear, it was only transformed – now manifesting itself at the level of expert committees assigning grades (Vandysheva, 2015).

Furthermore, as a result of many years of isolation from international research, the quality of education at state universities in humanities and social sciences remained quite low (Zhuravleva, 2022). Many universities continued to use textbooks published in the Soviet period, with references to Marxist-Leninist theories.

No less important was the issue of salaries for scholars and lecturers. The maximum scholarship for a postgraduate student at the largest university in the country, Moscow State University, was around USD 150 during that period (Provision on Scholarship Support and Other Forms of Material Support for Students at Moscow State University dated 31.10.2016). The unattractive work conditions caused a considerable number of postgraduate students to move abroad. From 2010 to 2019, the number of postgraduate students in Russia almost halved – from 157.000 to 84.000 (Sergeev, 2021). This means that only half of the students could continue their research in Russia. The salary of university lecturers varied from USD 450 to 1.600 depending on the university and region (Balagaev et al., 2021).

The number of Russian scientists who have left the country from 2012 to 2021



According to experts, the lack of proper research funding in Russia is one of the main causes of brain drain, which has increased fivefold since 2012 (Aleksandrov, 2021). Tens of thousands of well-educated Russians leave the country every year, which costs the economy tens of billions of dollars. The number of scientists leaving Russia increased from 14.000 in 2012 to 70.000 in 2021 (Kommersant, 2021). At this time there is no precise statistical data available in open sources about the number of scientists who have left Russia after February 2022.

The state of Russian higher education is clearly demonstrated by the “Russian Academic Excellence” project, also known as the 5-100 project. The ultimate goal of the project was to adapt Russian universities to international standards, with the main indicator of success being the inclusion of five Russian universities into the top 100 university world ranking list. The project lasted from 2012 to 2020, but despite over USD 1 billion spent, only one university (Moscow State Lomonosov University) made it into the top 100 (Iakoreva, 2019).

3. State control of scientific and education institutions

Specialists and students of higher education institutions have limited opportunities to address issues connected to improving the quality of education and the prestige of Russian universities due to a lack of democratic governance instruments. According to a law passed in 1987, rectors are to be elected through a free and democratic procedure (Kuchinskii, Kolobakina and Nechaev, 2021). However, the final decision still rests with the founder of the university. In most cases, the founder is the state. Since 2009, the two largest universities in Russia, Moscow State University and St. Petersburg State University, have had a special status, and the rectors of these universities are appointed directly by the President of Russia.

Since 2019, age restrictions for appointment to the position of the rector of these universities have been removed (Interfax, 2019). Numerous attempts by students to restore the election of rectors and preserve the autonomy of universities have been unsuccessful.

The overwhelming majority of Russian university leaders are connected to the regime and the ruling party. According to a study conducted by the independent student magazine DOXA, 47% of rectors of major Russian universities are members of the ruling party or represented the party as deputies in parliamentary bodies; 2% of rectors previously worked in state security bodies of the Russian Federation; 73% of rectors at Russian universities previously worked or continue to work in the government (Kuchinskii, Kolobakina and Nechaev, 2021). For their loyalty to the regime, universities receive additional funding, while rectors receive state awards and high-ranking positions in state organisations.

Another example of a lack of functioning democratic mechanisms in Russian universities is trade unions. According to the federal law “On Education in the Russian Federation”, students and lecturers have the right to create unions to lobby their interests with decision-making bodies (article 34). At the same time, the law lacks a list of rights that trade unions have in education institutions (University Solidarity, 2022). In many universities, employment contracts contain a clause prohibiting public statements about the internal life of the university without approval from the university leadership (Krasotkina, 2020).

4. State intervention in the content of humanities courses

In recent years the regime has attempted to take increasing control not only over the socio-political activity of students and university lecturers, but the content of the curriculum itself.

In 2021, the federal law “On Education in the Russian Federation” was amended, restricting educators’ ability to convey information freely concerning the historical, national, cultural and religious traditions of peoples (article 12).

The current vision of education of Russian authorities is reflected accurately in the words of State Duma deputy Leonid Slutsky: “It is impossible to conquer Russia with any modern weapon... But it is possible to try to weaken us from within, by reducing the level of education of our youth and shifting the emphasis in our system of values” (RIA Novosti, 2022).

History as a compulsory subject in higher education programmes

Since Russia’s full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian system of higher education has begun to experience even greater state control over the content of teaching, which has caused significant changes in the dynamics of the education process. Representatives of the army and the ruling party are becoming frequent guests at universities, attempting to attract the attention of students with lectures about the causes and prospects of the “special military operation”. Lecturers devote their lessons to the “SMO” and invite students to write letters or prepare parcels for Russian soldiers in Ukraine (Starodub, 2022).

Since September 2023, compulsory history teaching of 144 hours has been introduced at all universities, regardless of their profile and study area (Concept of Teaching Russian History in Study Areas Other than History at Higher Education Institutions, 2023). Previously, the number of academic hours for the study of history was considerably lower and varied depending on the faculties.

Essentially, history is used to promote state ideology in higher education. The interpretation of historical material is entirely subordinated to the interests of the state. With the aim of expanding and deepening students’ knowledge about the history of Russia in the 20th century, in both humanities and technical-engineering study programmes, the emphasis is on the 1917 revolution, the civil war, Stalin’s modernisation, the Great Patriotic War and the cold war (Petrov, 2022).

The recent decision by the Ministry of Education to introduce history lessons in primary schools and the decision of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education to include history in the compulsory curriculum of universities is part of a single long-term strategy of the state to establish a “single, correct” narrative of the interpretation of Russian history.

The course “Fundamentals of Russian Statehood”

Along with the compulsory study of history, from September 2023 the course “Fundamentals of Russian Statehood” is being introduced at universities. Over 3000 lecturers from 562 universities contributed to the discussions and development of the course (Vedomosti, 2023a). The development of the course was led by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education together with the “Znanie” (knowledge) society. The internal political block of the Kremlin oversaw the development process (Mukhametshina, 2023).

The course “Fundamentals of Russian Statehood” is compulsory for first-year students of all universities in the country. The course programme and textbooks are available in two versions: for students of sciences and humanities. The course duration is 72 hours in total, of which 18–20 hours are dedicated to extracurricular activities. The course programme is structured into five sections and includes both lectures and seminars.

The *first section*, “What is Russia”, concerns the “country in its spatial, human, resource, ideological/symbolic and political and regulatory domains” (Fundamentals of Russian Statehood, 2023). Students are told about the territory of the country, its resources, national business, infrastructure, and artefacts, and learn about Russian regions and local cultures. They are also told about Russian heroes, “the ordeals and victories of Russia” (Fundamentals of Russian Statehood, 2023).

The *second section* is entitled “The Russian State-Civilization”, and examines the historical, geographical, and institutional foundations of the establishment of the “Russian civilization”. This part of the course emphasises Russia’s cultural contribution, and its political influence, i.e. topics that allow students to understand “why Russia is a civilization”.

The *third section* entitled “The Russian World View and the Values of Russian Civilization” focuses on studying the “value structure of the Russian civilization”, the theoretical concepts of the world view and the “five-element model”, the so-called “penta-framework” (Foundation of Russian Statehood, 2023). The “five-element model” was developed by Andrei Polosin, head of the “DNA Russia” project (in the frames of which the course Foundation of Russian Statehood was developed), in cooperation with the Chief of the Presidential Directorate for Supporting Activities of the State Council of the Russian Federation Alexander Kharichev. The “penta-framework” includes five components: “individual – family – society – state – country”. These components echo the so-called traditional values which have become an essential part of state ideology.



Herzen University in St. Petersburg, one of the leading pedagogical universities in Russia
Credit: Ninara / www.flickr.com

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/ninara/31668995548/in/photostream/>

These five elements will be expanded as “ideas – symbols – standards – rituals – institutes”. Students will be told about the worldview and the “special perception of the Russian civilization”, and its main value principles: diversity, sovereignty, consensus, trust, and creativity. Russian civilization is also contrasted to Western-Euro-Atlantic civilisation (Federal Institute for Development of Education, 2023).

According to the project concept, this framework makes it possible to ensure a non-contradictory interpretation both of historical events and transformations in the current period (Federal Institute for Development of Education, 2023). Each constant includes certain terms: diversity – communality, adaptivity, stability; agreement – unity, spirituality, kindness; sovereignty – independence, “own path”, uniqueness; trust – legitimacy, idealism, solidarity; creativity – “the choice of new paths of development”, pioneering activity, “freedom and will”.

In the *fourth section*, “Russia’s Political System”, students learn about the Russian state and public institutions, “key cause-and-effect links of social transformation of the past years” (Foundation of Russian Statehood, 2023). Lectures are planned concerning the foundations of the constitutional system, branches of power and the institution of the Presidency, regional and local levels of power, national projects and state programmes, and possibilities for political engagement of citizens.

The *fifth section* “Challenges of the Future and the Development of the Country” highlights “civilizational challenges and value guidelines of Russian civilization” and “trajectories of realisation of the creative and professional potential of the individual”. The section is designed to inform students about global trends: technogenic risks, environmental challenges, and economic shocks.

The main narrative of this course – values-based guidelines for the development of Russia: stability, mission, responsibility, and justice. **The content of the course is devoted to one goal – to suppress further growth of oppositional sentiments among young people, by nurturing civic-mindedness and patriotism, as well as through the development of ownership for the destiny of the Homeland (Pertsev, 2023).**

Through the system of additional professional training, 30 universities shall offer training for lecturers who shall teach the course. The “core” university responsible for such training is the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (Fundamentals of Russian Statehood, 2023).

Control of teacher training

The state continues to intensify the function of controlling the professional training of teachers. Since 2023, universal standards have been introduced for training future teachers for each individual subject. The standards are based on the concept “The Core of Higher Pedagogical Education”. In accordance with the new standards, social and political sciences (except history), have been completely excluded from initial pedagogical education. Experts express concern over the consequences of these reforms, pointing out the risk of accelerating “socio-cultural illiteracy” among future educators (Tarasov, 2022). Adoption of the concept “Core of Higher Pedagogical Education” limits students’ worldview to the way that official policy would have them see it, through the parameters set by the state (Tarasov, 2022).

The institutionalisation of state control in higher education

State intervention in the content of education is increasingly becoming institutionalised. Since 2023, coordination centres for countering terrorism ideology and prevention of extremism are being set up in every region of the Russian Federation (Website of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2022). At the same time, any oppositional activity or public expression of disagreement is classified as terrorism and extremism by the Russian authorities.

To counter the spread of foreign values in the education process, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, together with the Ministry of Justice, created an inter-departmental work group to prepare and implement measures aimed at protecting the national interests of the Russian Federation in the fields of science and higher education from external influence. The main task of the work group is to detect nongovernmental organisations, which according to the workgroup's members are “the promoters and agents of the hidden influence” of the West (Falkov, 2022).

A Center for countering hybrid threats has been created at the Russian State Social University (RSSU) and has already begun its work. The centre trains specialists in hybrid warfare. This intellectual construct is extremely vaguely formulated, and it has not been possible to find the content of this course in the public domain. However, from the announcement posted on the centre's website, it is clear that “hybrid and information wars” are postulated as the permanent part (characteristic) of historical processes since the emergence of the state of Rus. The confrontation between Russia and Western civilization is asserted as total and wide-ranging. The aim of the centre is to prepare experts who can deal with this confrontation (RSSU, 2023).

Restriction of academic freedom, increased state regulation of curriculum, and “patriotization” of the entire education process, all of which aim at promoting state ideology and instilling loyalty to the regime, significantly limit possibilities for developing critical thinking among students, prevent the emergence of diverse opinions in the academic environment, and inevitably affect the formation of ideas and convictions among students.



Russian State Social University, Moscow

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RSSU.jpg>

5. The patriotic component in Russian higher education and its militarisation

Higher education institutions in Russia continue the work of schools in the development of patriotic sentiment among young people (Gorshkova, 2020). The system of patriotic education aims to develop civic spirit and patriotism as well as traditional values not only during the education process but also during extracurricular activities (Gorshkova, 2020).

The main extracurricular activities, aimed at moral and patriotic education, include the involvement of students in public military and patriotic movements, organising thematic events and socially significant volunteer projects.

Starting from the current academic year (2023/24), the module “Learning to Serve” shall be launched at 100 universities in Russia, in the frames of a pilot project. The project was developed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education together with the Ministry of Labor, the Russian Youth Organisation and the Association of Volunteer Centres and sets the goal of developing civic spirit, patriotism, leadership, civic solidarity, and traditional values (Maier, 2023). Implementation of this project will make it possible to fill the gaps in “practice-oriented education of a world view nature”, designed for students to apply academic knowledge in practice (Maier, 2023).



Important Conversations. An online service for contact teachers

Source: website of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation

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The state pays special attention to patriotic education at pedagogical universities. Mirroring practices adopted at schools, it is proposed to introduce such activities as raising the flag, performing the national anthem, and holding “Important Conversations” at pedagogical universities under the Education Ministry (TASS, 2023a).

Parallel with the process of ideologization and intensification of education and patriotic work, the militarisation of the higher education system is gradually taking place.

The first signs of militarisation of the higher education system began to appear before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since 2019, military training centres have been opening at universities, replacing regular departments. According to the Resolution of the Russian Government

No. 848 dated 03.07.2019, the main tasks of such centres are “implementation of military preparedness training programmes, carrying out moral education and military-career orientation activities for youth”. The military training centres offer several levels of military training for students, including the possibility of subsequent enlistment in the Armed Forces. By the end of 2021, there were over 100 such centres in the country. On 30th of November 2022, the Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu announced the initiative to create another 16 similar institutions, which would mean that the availability of their services would be expanded from 52 to 68 regions of the country. Ultimately the number of military training centres will be increased to 120 (Regnum, 2022).

Cossack organisations are another important stakeholder in supporting the state in the process of instilling patriotic values among young people and preparing them for military service. An overview of goals connected to the training of a pool of specialists for these organisations is outlined in the State Policy Strategy Regarding Russian Cossacks 2021–2030 approved in 2020. The strategy assigns an important role in training such specialists to higher education institutions.

In 2021, the Research Commission of the Presidential Council for Cossack Affairs put forward the idea of creating an association of universities which implement activities connected to the topics of Russian Cossacks or Cossack organisations i.e. have “Cossack-themed components” in their work. The main tasks of the member universities of the association are defined as “training specialists for Cossack organisations, opposing falsification of the history of Russian Cossacks, and the specialised training of Cossacks for subsequent state or municipal service (Website of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2021). Currently, the association includes 18 universities (Russian Cossacks, 2023).

In addition to restricting academic freedom and militarising the educational process, there are a number of other mechanisms through which the system of higher education is actively militarised. With the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, universities are actively involved in organising various campaigns to raise funds for the army (Podolskaja, Dubrovsky, 2023).

Militarisation of higher education in Russia is also taking place through the mechanism of quota allocation for university studies for participants of the “special military operation” and their children. As of 19 July 2023, 352 universities received over 10.000 enrolment applications from participants of the “SMO” and their children (Interfax, 2023).

Analysis of changes taking place in the higher education system in recent years shows the growing role of universities in supporting national interests and the mobilisation of resources for the achievement of military goals.

6. Isolation and export of Russian higher education

Nineteen years of adaptation of Russian higher education to international standards and investment of billions of dollars ended in Russia's *withdrawal** from the Bologna system in May 2022. Opinions differ as to how the withdrawal will influence Russian higher education. Both the post-Soviet and the Bologna systems coexisted in Russian higher education even when Russia officially switched to the Bologna standards. Many universities used the old system of assessments instead of the ECTS credits. Academic mobility was not well developed even at the time when Russia was part of the Bologna system, thus some experts believe that the withdrawal will not have a significant effect on academic mobility (Nikushina, 2023). Others believe that this step will condemn Russian higher education to isolation and lack of recognition (Abankina, 2022 in Odoevtseva, 2023).

Russia's withdrawal from the Bologna Agreement raises the crucial concern about the new model which will replace the current one that officials have been trying to introduce into the higher education system during the last two decades. **The Minister of Science and Higher Education Valery Falkov announced the creation of Russia's own unique model of higher education, which should be based on the interests of the national economy and provide maximum opportunities for every student (Kommersant, 2022b).**

The new model of the Federal State Education Standard is to be presented before the end of 2023. The government's plans propose returning to the Soviet model of higher education – a specialisation with a five-year study programme (Dvoretiskii, 2023). Preserving the two-cycle system is also under discussion, where this corresponds to the possibilities of the labour market, for example, bachelor's and master's degrees may remain in humanities, economics and other fields of study. The new standards will most likely reflect the model "2+2+2", which means that the first two years of study will be devoted to fundamental knowledge and forming a comprehensive picture of the world among students, specialisation in the second two years, and the last two years will be dedicated to in-depth knowledge development at master's level. **It is yet unclear how the model of higher education in Russia will be developed.**

Today, when cooperation with Western partners is constrained by profound political and value-based disagreements, Russian authorities are looking for possibilities for cooperation and expansion beyond European borders. The state clearly has the need for expansion and export of Russian higher education.

The trend for the export of higher education fits well with the goals outlined in the ideology of the "Russian world" – to expand Russia's sphere of influence outside the country. To achieve this goal, the state supported the establishment of a special partnership among universities – Exporters of Russian Education, numbering over 80 education institutions, which will coordinate their efforts to promote Russian education outside Russia (Russian Universities – Exporters, 2022).

* This information is based on the stated intentions of the Russian Federation to withdraw from the "Bologna system", voiced in 2022, after its right of participation in the work program and the governance bodies of the European Higher Education Area had been suspended in April 2022 as a consequence of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This suspension was reconfirmed in the Tirana Communiqué (May 2024). No official letter of withdrawal was ever submitted by the Russian Federation to the Co-Chairs or Secretariat of the European Area Higher Education. (Footnote amended June 2024).

The expansion of Russian higher education is meant to achieve both commercial and ideological goals. To achieve the set goals, a priority project “Development of the Export Potential of the Russian Education System (2017–2025)” was established, which was later supplemented by the federal project “Export of Education (2019–2024)” (Federal Project “Export of Education”, 2018).

According to the project implementation plan, the number of foreign students who study on campus at Russian universities should increase from 220.000 in 2017 to 710.000 in 2025, and the number of foreign students of online courses must increase from 1.100.000 to 3.500.000 (Detailed plan of the priority project “Development of the Export Potential of the Russian Education System”, 2017). Funds received from the export of Russian education should increase more than fivefold i.e. to over 373 billion rubles by 2025 (Website of the Government of the Russian Federation, 2017).

Central Asian countries remain one of the priority areas of export of Russian higher education. According to data from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 160.00 citizens of Central Asian countries study annually in Russia, of these 59.000 students receive grants from the Russian state. Uzbekistan holds the leading position in Central Asia for the number of Russian university branches, with 14 such branches in 2022 (Petrov, 2022).

Russia is also an attractive educational partner for Kazakhstan. Six branches of Russian universities operate in the country (Petrov, 2022). Owing to language and cultural ties, geographical proximity and education accessibility, over 10% (61.000) of the total number of students in Kazakhstan choose to study at Russian universities (Kirsanov, 2023).

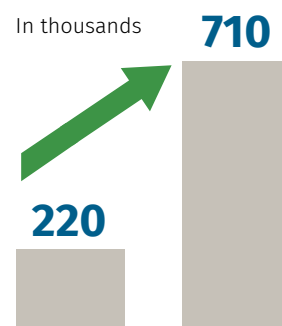


Foreign students of Vyatka State University of Humanities

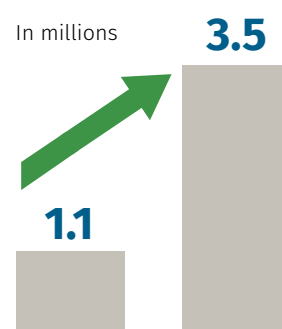
Credit: Vyatsu / commons.wikimedia.org

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Vyatka_State_Humanitarian_University

Planned increase in the number of full-time foreign students at Russian universities (from 2017 to 2025)



Planned increase in the number of foreign participants in online courses of Russian education institutions (from 2017 to 2025)



China is also a strategic destination for the export of Russian higher education. Over 32.000 students from China study at Russian universities (Website of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2023). Cooperation between Russian and Chinese universities is undergoing rigorous development. 95 joint study programmes between Russian and Chinese universities as well as 18 institutions jointly established in China show the aspiration of both countries to strengthen educational ties and partnership (RIA Novosti, 2023a).

Cooperation in the area of education with countries of the African continent has a long history and is rooted in the Soviet period when cooperation in education was part of the ideological, political and economic strategy for promoting Soviet influence in Africa.

Interaction between African countries and Russia in the field of education has not lost its relevance today. There is a constant increase in the number of students from African countries who receive higher education in Russia. In 2022–2023, 35.000 African students studied at Russian universities (Vedomosti, 2023b).

The Russian government annually increases quotas of governmental grants for students from African countries (4.700 places) (TASS, 2023b).

New formats of cooperation are under development between Russia and African countries in the sphere of higher education. In August 2021 the Russian-African network university, which includes 12 Russian universities, was founded with the aim of creating a “common educational and research space, as well as for promotion of intercultural dialogue” (Website of the Ministry of Defence, 2023). The export of Russian education to the African continent is regarded by the Russian state as a possibility for developing interaction between generations (Barabanov et al., 2023).

The export and expansion of education are used by the Russian state as an effective tool for promoting its influence outside its territory.

7. In search of an alternative to Russian higher education

A significant number of university lecturers and intellectuals who disagree with censorship in Russian higher education and restriction of academic freedoms were simply expelled from the state education system in Russia.

Together, a progressive community of educators and students has established the Free University – an independent education project free from administrative pressure and censorship (Novaya Gazeta, 2020). The initiators of the project – lecturers at the School of Philosophy Viktor Gorbato, Yulia Gorbato and Kirill Martynov, and professor of the law faculty at the Higher School of Economics (HSE) Yelena Lukyanova, aimed at reviving the university and freeing educators from any kind of official control (Free University Manifesto, 2020). The

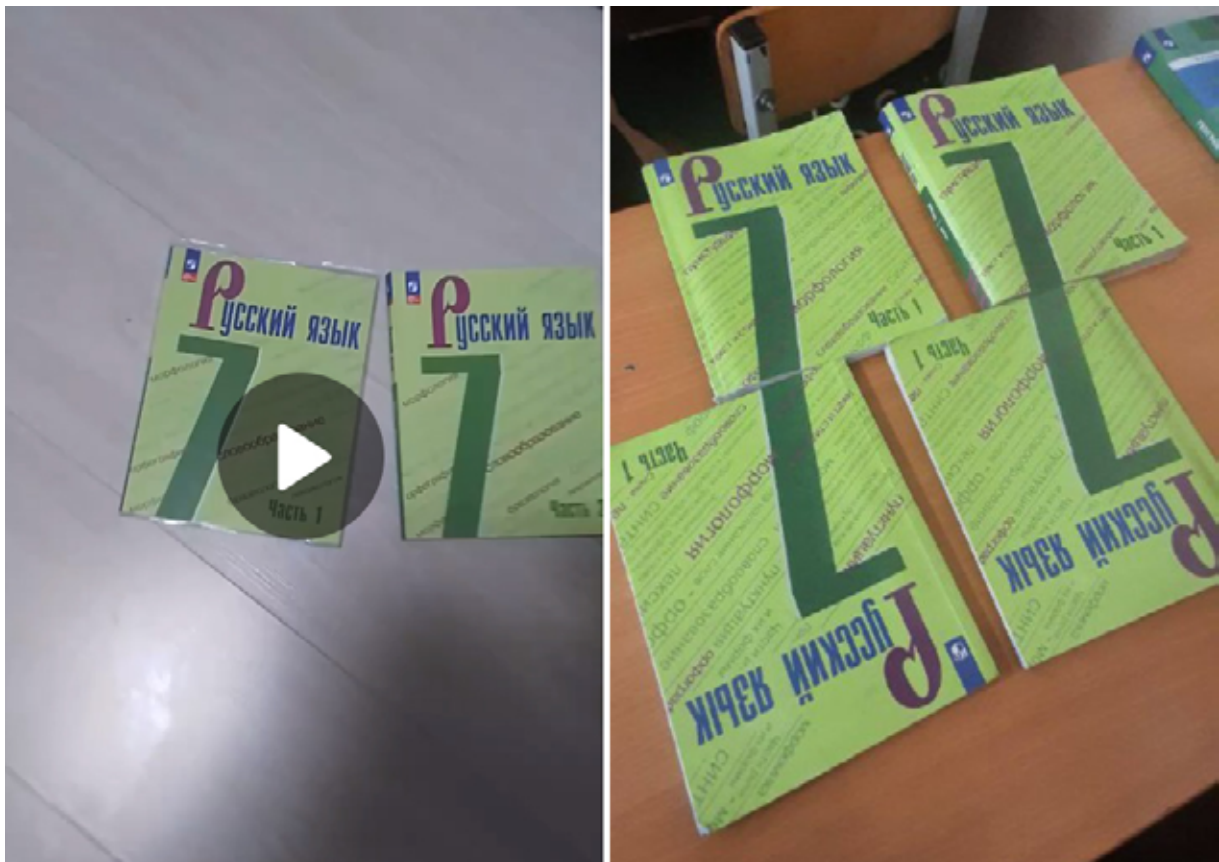
majority of the teaching staff left Russia after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. In March 2023, The Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation labelled the Free University as an "undesirable organisation" (BBC Russia, 2023). Following this decision, the academic council of the university announced that the work of the institution shall be suspended in Russia (Radio Free Europe, 2023), and announced plans for the development of the university outside The Russian Federation. The services of the university are free and delivered online, using techniques widely developed during the pandemic period. Students are accepted based on motivation letters and have access to a wide range of courses, in science and humanities.

Another example is connected to the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, which stopped enrolment to its Liberal Arts faculty in 2022. This decision was made after absurd accusations by The Prosecutor General's Office that the faculty engaged in "undermining traditional values". The Prosecutor General's Office deemed that the faculty violated articles 38 and 43 of the Constitution on the care, upbringing and education of young people (Anisimova, Antohina and Gubernatorov, 2022). According to the Prosecutor General's Office, faculty staff were unable to guarantee that the "Law on Protecting Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development" was upheld. In addition, a letter addressed by The Prosecutor General's Office to the Liberal Arts faculty mentions the "destructive foreign influence on Russian youth through education programmes" of the faculty (RBC, 2022). Lecturers of the faculty united with their "disgraced" colleagues of the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (MSSES, better known as "Shaninka"), and initiated the establishment of the independent Liberal Arts faculty in Montenegro. In spring 2023, Liberal Arts were added to the list of educational qualifications in Montenegro. Creating this programme gives the opportunity for lecturers and students from Russia to continue teaching and learning in line with European education standards, which are under attack in modern-day Russia.

CONCLUSION

In the last decades, Russian state policy in education has been increasingly dependent on the political agenda. Ideologically motivated propaganda and religious values have become an inseparable part of the Russian system of values; the protection of traditional values and the “Russian world” is declared to be a priority in domestic and foreign policy.

These official narratives find their reflection in the Russian education system, where history is a tool of policy and propaganda, and is used by the regime to indoctrinate the younger generation and ensure their support for its legitimacy.



Flashmob for creating the letter “Z” using Russian language textbooks

Source: Telegram channel of Ekaterina Mizulina

https://t.me/ekaterina_mizulina/5249?single

Changes and practices introduced in school and university curricula indicate that the Soviet legacy is of great significance for the current education system in Russia. This is further illustrated by the active ideological indoctrination of the younger generation, a constant focus on patriotism and the militarisation of youth organisations.

The comprehensive changes implemented by the state, in the system of Russian education, in recent years are aimed at shaping loyal citizens from the cradle to the grave (Dixon, 2022). To this end, the regime actively reviews curriculum, promoting content based on state rhetoric and asserting the version of historical events, where the role of Russia as a great nation is emphasised.

Education is used as a tool in the interests of the state, and is increasingly focused on serving ideology, to the detriment of didactic tasks: it blocks critical thinking and prescribes modes of behaviour and thinking approved by the state, thus working against the interest of personal development.

State policy in the field of education is the guarantee of long-term stability and viability of any regime (Gellner, 2008). Its implementation contributes to the identity formation of young people and their development as citizens.

It is fascinating that by appealing to traditional values and focusing on patriotism, the leadership of the Russian Federation is firmly convinced of its status as the successor of the Russian Empire and the USSR. Nonetheless, despite the similarities in the methods employed by the state to socialize the younger generation by instilling in them the values and norms of society, the vectors of value orientations in the Soviet period and contemporary Russia are different.

The Soviet vector was focused on the “bright future”, the utopian concept of Soviet propaganda, while the modern Russian vector is nostalgic for the past and focuses on religious and traditional values.

The ideology offered by the regime is anchored to the past and thus unable to offer the nation a new direction for development (Kolesnikov, 2015).

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