

Bureaucrats Go to School to Learn Honesty

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Interior Ministry and prosecution officials make up the bulk of the students. **Igor Tabakov**

The Russian Academy of Civil Service has started one of the most ambitious anti-corruption programs yet, and it's aimed directly at the source of the problem — bureaucrats.

By the end of this year, as many as 500 officials from the Interior Ministry, the Prosecutor General's Office and other government agencies will have completed a one-week course at the Kremlin-run academy on how to combat corruption.

The first 100 officials have completed the course on direct orders from President Dmitry Medvedev, said Igor Bartsits, deputy rector responsible for the program at the Russian Academy of Civil Service.

Over the next two months, the course will enroll 400 more officials from specialized anti-corruption departments in their respective organizations. Most students, Bartsits said, are

from the Interior Ministry and the Prosecutor General's Office.

The officials will complete 36 academic hours on 11 topics, including the analysis of the competence of a government employee, criminal and legal methods to fight corruption, and how to refrain from illegal activities. Each class will last 1 1/2 to 4 1/2 academic hours, including hands-on practice modules and open discussions.

The course is taught by academy professors as well as visiting lecturers, including Yury Tikhomirov, deputy director of the Institute for Legislation and Comparative Jurisprudence; Nikolai Stolyarov, deputy chief of staff at the Audit Chamber; and officials from the legal division of the presidential administration, the Interior Ministry, the Federal Security Service and the Prosecutor General's Academy.

"Upon completing the program, the civil servants must be able to give a fair assessment of their colleagues' statements submitted in connection with internal investigations without exceeding the boundaries of their roles, as well as report any attempts to bribe or corrupt them to their superiors and the prosecutor's office," Bartsits said.

Those who successfully pass the final examination will get a certificate in continuing professional education.

Until recently, Russia did not have much to offer in terms of an academic approach to the fight against corruption. However, the department of government management at the Academy of National Economy, sponsored by the federal government, now offers three relevant courses as part of its programs: fighting corruption, economic security and corruptibility analysis. Just like the courses at the Russian Academy of Civil Service, they are in demand mostly with government agencies, even though they are open to the general public. The courses last 30 to 70 academic hours, department chairman Sergei Zuyev said.

Incidentally, the Russian Academy of Civil Service, which answers to the presidential administration, and the Academy of National Economy merged into one organizational structure Sept. 20.

Several universities have offered anti-corruption programs that were custom-made for a single government organization. The Higher School of Government Audit, which is a faculty within Moscow State University, ran such a course last year specifically for the employees of the Audit Chamber.

The government faces a daunting task in curbing corruption because it is 30 years behind the rest of the developed world in its fight against corruption, said Yelena Panfilova, director of the Russia office for Transparency International, which compiles an annual index measuring the perception of corruption in 180 countries. Last year, Russia was ranked 146th (with 180th being the most corrupt), a notch up from 147th the previous year and on par with Kenya. The 2010 index is to be released this week.

By offering the anti-corruption courses, Russia is following the lead of most developed countries, Panfilova said. Many developed countries also have a code of conduct for civil service employees and an established system to monitor their adherence to it, she said.

But officials who attend the course offered by the Russian Academy of Civil Service need more than one week to learn anti-corruption measures, said Alexander Vasilyev, director of the Higher School of Government Audit.

He said his school, whose longest course on the subject lasts two months, was only able to include the basic issues in its program.

Vasilyev said even more time was needed to fully cover the variants of corruption specific to each branch of civil service.

"It is also very important to have a practice module, especially in the area of developing expert analysis skills on anti-corruption issues," he said.

Claire Cameron, director of Public Administration International, a British-based consultancy that runs its own anti-corruption training programs, said each topic in her organization's anti-corruption course — such as averting corruption-related risks, government transparency and freedom of information — is studied in separate modules lasting one to two weeks. Courses include meetings with experts, international case studies, visits to government agencies and interaction with the media.

Similar programs developed by other international training providers are also usually quite detailed. Norwegian-based U4 runs two-day crash courses and one- to six-week programs devoted entirely to one topic each, insisting that knowledge is better absorbed this way. A standard training course by the Australian Independent Anti-Corruption Commission, which was set up 21 years ago, lasts two weeks.

The course recently introduced at the Russian Academy of Civil Service was originally designed to take two weeks as well, but the school was pressured to cut it down to one to limit the time that government employees took off work to complete it. The emphasis, the school said, has been made instead on what it calls a procedural learning model. It is based on legal rules and is considered a necessity because corruption-related cases in Russian courts are frequently conducted with gross procedural errors, the school said.

Olga Kolovitskova, head of continued professional education at the Academy of National Economy, said training programs for civil servants are the most important component in the country's fight against corruption. She said, however, that all educational efforts will stop making sense in real-life conditions if government employees are not constantly monitored and do not fear certain punishment for corruption-related offenses. Otherwise, Kolovitskova said, corruption will remain a mass phenomenon.

In the West, corruption is held back by an elaborate web of controls. In each government institution in France, for instance, the director's financial activity is monitored on a daily basis by two dedicated inspectors, one from the Finance Ministry and another from the Budget Ministry. There are frequent external and internal audits, and the results of all audits are published on a dedicated web site.

Sergei Filonovich, chairman of the department of management at the Higher School of Economics, said the Russian government would do better to start its fight against corruption by building a system where corruption became economically unfeasible, rather than by

training government employees to essentially fight against themselves.

Pavel Kudyukin, a lecturer on public administration at the Higher School of Economics, suggested that the new crash course at the Russian Academy of Civil Service might be an attempt to boost Russia's standing before a looming European audit of its compliance with the European anti-corruption convention.

Panfilova also expressed concern that the anti-corruption course might turn into a publicity stunt. She said the most important thing, however, is for the program to continue at the Russian Academy of Civil Service.

The fate of the program will be decided in December by the president's anti-corruption council.

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