

Why Russia Is Not for Foreigners

December 15, 2010

The  Moscow Times

There are some people who love making speeches about Russia's so-called power vertical and democratic institutions, and there are other people who would benefit greatly from them in their daily occupations — if only the vertical and democratic institutions actually existed.

Here is one example.

This winter, as every winter, a few dozen young people who are slated to graduate next year from the world's leading universities will have job interviews at the economics departments of several Moscow universities. Each will present a seminar and meet individually with department professors. These candidates will surely be in demand. Some will be offered assistant professorships, and the universities offering positions must persuade the candidate to choose Moscow over other cities in the world.

To that end, it would help immensely if Russia's power vertical and democratic institutions both existed and functioned smoothly. Otherwise, as happens now, the hiring institution will be forced to pay an inflated salary to compensate for the numerous drawbacks associated with living and working in Russia.

I am not speaking about the problems with science and education in Russia per se, but about the larger problems in the country — the requirement that universities have to offer unusually high salaries to convince scholars to work in Russia. This problem applies to nearly every scientific discipline as well. This is a problem in attracting both outstanding foreign graduates and Russian graduates who are good enough to receive job offers from foreign academic institutions.

But if Russia's power vertical really functioned, parents whose children have dark complexions or are from former Soviet republics in Central Asia would not have to worry about letting them ride the Moscow metro or taking a walk in the evening.

My recruitment experience shows that Russian graduates will even opt for a position in a backwater European or U.S. university before agreeing to live and work in Russia. That is because when democratic institutions really are in place, those who want to expel dark-skinned foreigners from Moscow by force are kept within check and are most often considered outcasts by society.

Ten years ago, when Russia had competitive elections, it was possible to vote for Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy — who, by the way, voiced his support for the nationalists and neo-fascists who chanted racist slogans and rioted on Manezh Square on Saturday.

In the past, the Zhirinovskiy factor, among other things, made it more difficult to attract foreign professors to Moscow, but this is nothing compared with the problems the city is facing now.

On the backdrop of bloody riots with thousands of nationalists and neo-fascists chanting "Russia for Russians!" there are now many more reasons why foreign professors and specialists will take a pass on Moscow when they are deciding where they would like to apply their skills and knowledge abroad.

Konstantin Sonin is a professor at the New Economic School in Moscow and a columnist for Vedomosti.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2010/12/15/why-russia-is-not-for-foreigners-a3780>