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Brain Drain Is Reducing Russia to a Blank Space

By Angelina Davydova

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The laws recently signed by President Vladimir Putin, most notably the ones on "foreign agents," defamation and the Internet, seem to be aimed at overprotecting Russians. These laws assume that Russians can't possibly deal with the issues of abundant information on their own – and thus need a caring mentor to guide them through the dangers of life.

The Kremlin views Russians like kindergartners and are truly worried that the threats of Western influence, uncontrolled flow of information on the Internet are seriously damaging the innocent souls of most Russians.

This "kindergarten approach" directly contradicts the frequent declarations by Russian officials about the need to support civil society and encourage innovation, modernization and entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurs, scientists and innovators do exist in Russia, but their numbers are

automatically limited by the limitations the government places on them.

There are many more Russians who excel outside of Russia — in the world's leading universities, think tanks, international companies and organizations. Obviously, this talented diaspora of talent does not contribute to Russia's development.

Why is any criticism of the current political course perceived as undermining the foundations of the state? Why are public interests being exchanged for the interests of a particular ruling elite?

It is true that these problems are not unique to Russia, but it would make far more sense to strive toward a better solution than crawling back into the mythical stability of the late Soviet system.

All over the world, a growing dissatisfaction with government is leading people onto the streets. We are seeing the growing power of local communities and an increase in discussions on strengthening democracy, sustainable growth and entrepreneurship.

With its immense richness in natural and human capital, Russia should be doing far better. Any forward-looking government should be concerned with developing a strategy for bottom-up initiatives rather than prohibiting them.

Instead, in the Kremlin's campaign to suppress individual initiative, it throws out the innovative baby with the bath water. When there is no demand for talented and innovative Russians in their own country, it is inevitable that they will seek better and more productive lives in other countries. As a result, Russia is turning into a blank space on the world map.

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