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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia's Future Harvard University

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The Higher School of Economics in Moscow, one of the true academic wonders of our time, celebrated its 20th anniversary this week. In those 20 years, many of its departments have become the leading research centers in their respective fields and the educational program stands head and shoulders above its closest competitors in Russia. In many ways, the Higher School of Economics is the first university in the country to reach global standards.

The Higher School of Economics has achieved the most in disciplines that were among the weakest during the Soviet period: economics and the humanities. Twenty years ago, there were no specialists or academic programs in many of the fields that the Higher School of Economics offers.

Among other things, the university hires professors through open, international competition, just as the process is done by the rest of the world and by only two other Russian universities. Ever more surprisingly, some of the greatest accomplishments have been made in fields that were previously dominated by other universities. Although the university's mathematics department came into existence quickly, it has already gained a reputation as perhaps the best in Russia and is on its way to earning a high spot in international rankings as well. While the Higher School of Economics' mathematics and other departments have excelled, more

prominent mathematics departments have declined over the past 20 years.

As former academic citadels like Moscow State University lost their leading scientists and plummeted in the rankings, the Higher School of Economics opened new departments, established a transparent hiring policy and created decent working conditions. The result is that young academics with doctoral degrees from all over the world submit their applications to the Higher School of Economics to join the faculty, and the numbers continue to grow each year.

Several new departments, including history and philology, were opened in the past two years, and now the university attracts the best specialists from other leading Moscow universities. This is not so much because the salaries are higher at the Higher School of Economics — many Moscow universities pay their "star professors" as much — but because it has created a true "university atmosphere," which we have only read about in books on 19th-century Russia and that until recently only existed abroad. The professors and students run the university, the administrators are serious professionals, and the courses are not only on par with the world's leading universities but also constantly change and adapt to the latest innovations.

While other universities talk about internationalization, the Higher School of Economics has offered exchange programs to allow hundreds of students to study abroad and return home to Russia. It has also hired dozens of prominent foreign instructors, including visiting professors and fellows.

To be included in international rankings as a full-fledged research university, an institution must also offer education in difficult disciplines, such as medicine, biology and chemistry. They are difficult because they are expensive to equip and difficult to manage. I think the Higher School of Economics directors are not planning this move, but if they do, I am certain that the departments they create will be no worse than the very best in Russia.

Happy birthday, Higher School of Economics! I wish you even more success!

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