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Education Watchdog Revokes License of Top Russian University

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Olga Lukinova / MSSES

A state education watchdog has revoked the accreditation of a prestigious Russian private university in what critics fear could further erode independent education in the country.

Founded in 1995 as a project to bring British and Russian education models together, the Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences, also known as Shaninka, reportedly boasts some of Russia's highest-earning graduates and is highly competitive among management students. It's the second privately-run university to face high-profile censure by education authorities in the last two years.

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Russia's education watchdog Rosobrnadzor ordered the school's education accreditation be revoked this week after it said inspections this spring found 11 of its master's and bachelor's

programs in violation of state education standards.

The school's rector Sergei Zuyev assuaged fears of a shutdown in an online statement, saying "a withdrawal of accreditation doesn't mean a suspension of educational activity."

Accreditation gives the university the right to issue state diplomas, reported Russian business website The Bell, which Shaninka has only had for the past decade.

The Bell quoted a senior administrator at Shaninka as saying that geopolitical tensions with Britain and security services' concern about its connections abroad could have influenced the watchdog's decision to withdraw accreditation.

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"There was an impression that the FSB considered the school too independent and too often in contact with foreign universities, a 'real hotbed of liberalism'," the anonymous source told The Bell. Other university sources dismissed this concern as a conspiracy theory.

The move comes two years after Rosobrnadzor stripped the European University in St. Petersburg, one of Russia's leading private post-graduate schools for the social sciences and humanities, of its license over building code violations. The move narrowed the university's educational scope primarily to research, rather than teaching.

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