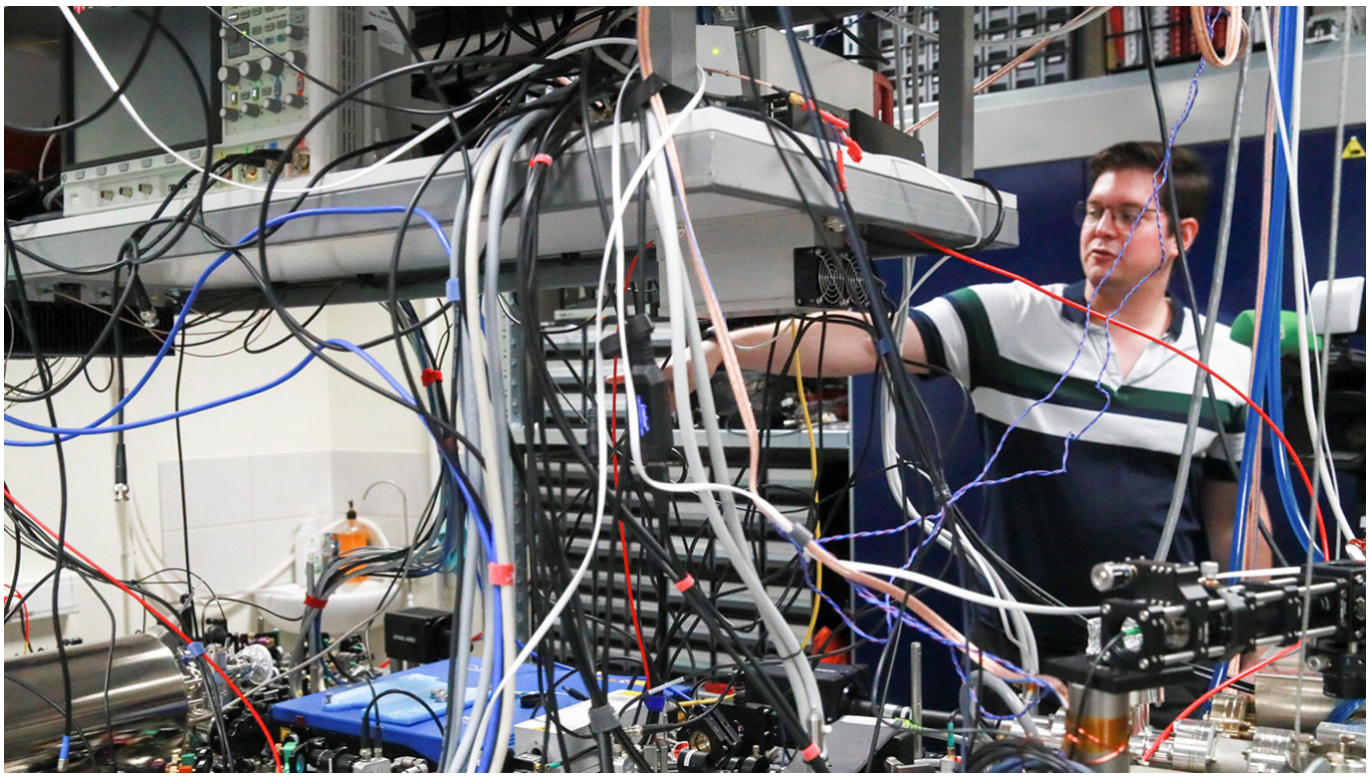
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Russian Universities Advised to Pre-Authorize Academic Trips to 'Unfriendly' Countries, Report Says

By Mack Tubridy

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A laboratory at Moscow State University's Center for Quantum Technologies. **Vasily Kuzmichenok / Moskva News Agency**

Russian education authorities have advised universities and research institutions to assess the risks of their employees' planned work trips to so-called "unfriendly" countries and decide in advance whether such travel should be approved, the Vedomosti newspaper reported Monday, citing sources familiar with the matter.

The Science and Higher Education Ministry is said to have circulated an advisory notice to academic institutions in late January, a month after Polish law enforcement authorities arrested Alexander Butyagin, a top archaeologist from Russia's prestigious State Hermitage Museum.

Ukraine has accused Butyagin of carrying out unauthorized excavations in annexed Crimea. The Kremlin has called his arrest "legal abuse" and has demanded his release.

It was not immediately clear if the Hermitage Museum had approved the archaeologist's travel to Europe, where he gave lectures in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic before his arrest in December. The museum said Butyagin was on vacation at the time of his arrest.

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Vedomosti reported that at least one university had already "frozen" several staff work trips planned for this spring even before the Science and Higher Education Ministry circulated its notice last month. One source said some academics with planned travel to Western countries now fear they could be detained on political grounds.

Two academics at major Russian universities told The Moscow Times they were unaware of any advisory from the Science and Higher Education Ministry.

A third academic, describing the Vedomosti report as "noise," said it is common practice for universities to require advance approval for work trips, regardless of whether employees are traveling inside Russia or abroad.

A PhD student at the Higher School of Economics, who asked not to be identified by name, said Russian scholars now rarely travel to conferences or other events in countries Moscow labels "unfriendly," in part due to restrictions on cooperation that Western institutions imposed after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

"In general, I don't see anything out of the ordinary in this news," the student said. "We rarely go on these kinds of trips."

It is therefore unclear what practical impact the Science and Higher Education Ministry's advisory will have given that academic exchanges between Russia and the West were already constrained.

Still, some Russian scholars do occasionally travel to Western countries for work and continue to publish with their Western colleagues, as both The Moscow Times' and Vedomosti's sources confirm.

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