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**STATE POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION
OF RUSSIA AT PRESENT**

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Abstract
of the dissertation for the degree of
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The relevance of the study is based on the demand of Russian society for the domestic higher education system to align with modern and prospective trends in political, economic, technogenic and civilisational development.

The President's Address to the Federal Assembly on February 21, 2023 mentions the need for a substantial change in the higher education system taking into account new challenges. One of the key requirements for further social progress is the readiness of Russian higher education, which is based on national values and employs the best international and domestic educational methods, to respond to current challenges, such as increasing need to improve the national higher education competitiveness in the global higher education system, innovative economic development, and rapid shifts in the labour market. Such a system should permeate and unite the society on a positive foundation infused with new meanings. The level of educational system development not only determines the skills of well-trained professionals who realises his/her civic responsibility in a democratic society, but also the socio-economic and political direction of national development. The State Higher Education Policy (SHEP) at all the stages reflects the political and ideological basis of the political system. The current focus on the Russian higher education system and national priorities is further intensified by the escalation of Russia's geopolitical confrontation with the West amid the Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine and the subsequent sanctions imposed by Western countries against Russia.

Over the past 30 years of the post-Soviet period, the political and administrative decisions made by the Russian political elite in the higher education system were primarily oriented toward integrating into the global educational system on terms set by other countries. However, Russia's participation in the Bologna Process for nearly two decades proved detrimental to the foundations of traditional education. It led to the abandonment of national state educational policy, as higher education institutions prioritized achieving high rankings

and gaining recognition within the European educational system based on values and priorities defined by Europe.

Under these circumstances, the Decree No. 343 dated by May 12, 2023 *‘On some issues of improving the system of higher education’* signed by the Russian President marked a fundamental political step. The Decree defined the direction of the State Higher Education Policy toward an independent higher education model aimed at preparing professional workforce for social and economic sectors regardless of any external circumstances.

The efficiency of the State Educational Policy of Higher Education in Russia and its alignment with current challenges are main determining factors shaping the country’s future, and the search for the most efficient solutions is an integral part of a rigorous scientific analysis. The study of the State Educational Policy aims to clarify its place and role in the Russian political system, its advantages and disadvantages as an instrument of political and administrative decisions, to identify contradictions and develop guidelines to overcome them on the way to a more independent educational system.

The object of the study is the educational policy of Russia.

The subject of the study is the educational policy of higher education in Russia at present.

The aim of the study is to identify and analyse the specifics of shaping and implementing the state higher education policy in Russia to date.

In order to fulfil the set goal, the following research tasks should be solved:

1. to carry out the operationalisation of the ‘state educational policy’ concept, to elaborate its modern definition by analysing theoretical and methodological approaches;
2. to study the interpretation of the state educational policy in Russian and foreign studies in the developmental context;
3. to analyse the influence of global educational policy on foreign universities’ practices in higher education in the 21st century;

4. to determine the main steps and specific features of the Russian state educational policy evolution (the years 1991-2025);

5. to identify the current controversies and determine the prospects of educational policy for the Russian higher education;

6. to prove how important sovereignty as a political trend is for the improvement of the Russian higher education system.

The hypothesis of the research lies in the understanding that the Russian educational policy is determined by the ideological goals of political-administrative management in a particular historical period; the more explicit the ideological and political foundations of the state are, the more distinct its vector is; and the political trend towards sovereignty is a political-administrative tool of politicising society, which aims the reserves of society and the state at achieving the strategic goals of Russia.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is formed within the analysis and synthesis of Russian and foreign researchers' ideas of building and implementing state educational policy in the subject logic of political research of the state educational policy in the context of political research of the state education management system, on the intellectual resource provided by the higher education system as an instrument that allows the state to maintain its sovereign existence as a political actor on the global stage.

The theoretical and methodological aspects of the study are as follows: the principles of the system approach, grounded in David Easton's Political Systems Theory; the concept of sovereignty proposed by Jean Bodin, which views sovereignty as a natural attribute of the state as the primary political and legal institution; a methodological approach based on the synthesis of two paradigms developed by researchers V. S. Komarovsky and E. G. Morozova in their study of radical changes in the principles and practices of political-administrative management in post-Soviet Russia.

For this purpose, the following techniques and methods were applied in the study:

- A systemic method, which allows to study the interaction between the higher education system and the external environment that is rapidly changing because of modern technological and political challenges;
- An institutional approach, which allows to analyse the role of main political institutions in forming and implementing the state educational policy;
- A communicative approach, which determines the direction of various information streams within political communication aimed at decision-making;
- A historical approach, which facilitates an understanding of the national logic and dynamics of the formation and implementation of state educational policy in a specific historical period, with a focus on identifying patterns and peculiarities of political decision-making in the state higher education policy;
- A structural-functional method, through which the functional significance of state institutions is revealed in the context of the formation and implementation of the state higher education policy;
- A qualitative content analysis method, which enables an in-depth study of the texts' contents within the context of identified interconnections of the processes researched, through understanding hidden content and constructing meaning;
- A dialectical method, used to identify contradictions relevant to the Russian higher education policy;
- A comparative method, allowing for the comparison and analysis of the specifics of each step of implementing the state higher education policy in Russia;
- A SWOT analysis of factors, which was applied to identify key trends and determine prospects for the development of the state higher education policy in Russia.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the following:

1. The study identifies and analyses the contradictions in theoretical and methodological approaches of the concept of 'state educational policy', determined by the specific nature of scientific differentiation. It substantiates

the common foundations of multiple scientific interpretations within the framework of a political science approach, enabling the definition of state educational policy as a fundamental tool of political-administrative management;

2. The study proves the existence of a growing trend in recognizing the socio-political significance of the education system as society evolves;

3. The study highlights the risks and threats faced by national governments in regulating their higher education systems due to the contradictory nature of global neoliberal education policy. This policy allows international actors to establish and dictate methods of education management, transforming education into an arena of political struggle given its critical importance;

4. The author provides an original interpretation of the main stages of Russian educational policy (regarding years 1991-2025) based on D. Easton's systematic approach and developed criteria. This interpretation aligns with the position and functions of the higher education system in the political system in different periods of transformation, determinable by the corresponding political-ideological, socio-economic, managerial, political and legal factors. The study defines the core characteristic of higher education policy as a mechanism of political-administrative management and explains its crucial role in the political system for shaping societal values;

5. The study identifies the contradictions relevant to the educational policy of the Russian state in higher education. It demonstrates that resolving these contradictions lies in the realm of political and administrative decision-making and provides substantiated proposals for addressing them;

6. The study substantiates the significance of the idea of sovereign higher education as a mechanism of politicisation. This mechanism fosters the basic political orientations, attitudes, values, and civic-mindedness characteristic of the modern Russian political system, ensuring its resilience to any external influences.

Key points of the study:

1. The study has clarified the modern understanding of the term "state educational policy" (SEP) within the basis of research tasks in the social sciences and humanities. The research highlights the interdependence of the SEP on the 'society, education, power' framework, enabling the integration of pedagogical, political science, philosophical, and political-economic perspectives to uncover the integrative and state-public dimensions of this policy. The state educational policy must address socio-economic and socio-political demands, including ensuring access to education, fostering conditions for socio-economic development, strengthening national potential, preserving sovereignty, and safeguarding state security.

2. By examining based on the study of the evolution of scientific views works on state activities in educational policy, conducted by both Russian and foreign researchers, the study identifies a growing trend in the socio-political significance of the education system as societies evolve. This evolution transitions education from being viewed as a product of intellectual activity to becoming a strategic state priority and a practice of political management. The research demonstrates that national education systems are designed to align with the values of their respective political systems. Furthermore, the analysis of contemporary scholarly perspectives on state educational policy reveals that the development of higher education systems is shaped by a variety of factors, including global political transformations, globalization processes, innovative economic development, technological advancements, and socio-economic conditions.

3. The study has identified the influence of global educational policy on foreign practices, leading to an increase in the socio-political significance of state educational policies in leading European countries as a result of growing global competition among technologically advanced nations in the 21st century. The crisis of the global education system, exacerbated by globalisation, has given rise to the concept of global education. Proponents of international educational structures advocate this concept as a global policy aimed at integrating national

education systems into a unified educational space based on common and equal principles. The development of academic mobility, which has gained new momentum within global education, is rooted in neoliberal ideology. It promotes global governance principles centered on democratization, free market competition, and the creation of a unified educational space as a new form of international cooperation. The study demonstrates that the qualitative standards of national education systems are increasingly shaped by global actors through international rankings, often disregarding the cultural and national specificities of individual states. This approach exacerbates inequality and poses a threat to the national interests of states.

4. The study has outlined and analyzed the stages of transformation in Russian higher education policy. By examining the core elements of the political system and the value foundations it seeks to uphold from 1991 to 2025, six distinct stages of transformation in Russian higher education policy have been identified. These stages are shaped by corresponding political-ideological, socio-economic, managerial, and political-legal factors. The analysis reveals that, throughout all stages of transformation, state educational policy plays a critical role in shaping societal value-based political orientations and serves as a central mechanism for political and administrative governance in Russia:

First Stage (1991–1995) – "Education in the Transition Period":

Second Stage (1996–1999) – "Free Educational Market, Competition, and Diversity of Ownership Forms":

Third Stage (2000–2008) – "Restoration of State Responsibility in Education":

Fourth Stage (2008–2019) – "Transition from Extensive to Intensive Model of Domestic Education Development":

Fifth Stage (2020–2021) – "Implementation of Online Technologies in Higher Education":

Sixth Stage (2022–2025) – "New Educational Reality". Formation of a sovereign education system.

5. The study identifies key contradictions within the Russian higher education policy, including:

- the misalignment between the two-cycle higher education system and the socio-economic and political challenges facing society;

- the decline in scientific and educational cooperation with Russia due to its withdrawal from the global educational space following the country's exit from the Bologna Process;

- the disconnect between the skills and knowledge provided by the higher education system and the current level of knowledge development;

- the oversupply of graduates in certain professions alongside a shortage of skilled workers in the Russian labor market;

- the erosion of the foundational nature of higher education, posing a threat to Russia's technological sovereignty and national security;

- educational inequality exacerbated by the gap between legal guarantees of citizens' rights to accessible and free education and the political-administrative decisions made in implementing the state educational policy;

- the declining appeal of regional universities and the risk of regional academic infrastructure deterioration due to their inability to compete with metropolitan institutions leveraging online technologies;

- the worsening social status of academic staff, compounded by increased workloads due to the introduction of online teaching formats without corresponding adjustments in remuneration.

The study demonstrates that resolving these contradictions requires political and administrative decision-making, and it provides substantiated proposals for addressing these challenges, namely, to preserve the fundamental base of the Russian higher education system as the foundation for the national higher education sovereignty; to strengthen the interdepartmental cooperation between experts from the ministries for further labour market monitoring and predicting changes of professions in demand; to establish sustainable cooperation between production and business community with educational organizations to boost

the employment opportunities of university graduates; state support for improving financial and technical conditions and the development of the digital segment of universities, contributing to increasing the competitiveness and attractiveness of domestic higher education; to finance scientific research at universities, to create new areas of education in accordance with the current requirements of the innovative economy; to create institutional conditions for accessibility of higher education by equalizing opportunities for people from all social groups (increasing the number of budget places in regional universities, etc.); to improve the academic exchange system through introducing new forms of mobility within the unified educational space of the Russian Federation and internationally with friendly countries.

6. The importance of sovereignty principles when forming and implementing the SEP in Russia at the current stage has been proven. In addressing this issue, it has been established that the concept of educational sovereignty, as a component of the politicization mechanism, shapes fundamental political orientations, attitudes, values, and civic identity inherent to a specific political system. This concept is realized in state educational policy through political-administrative decisions aimed at enhancing and dynamically advancing modern Russian education in response to the challenges facing the nation. In our view, the core of educational sovereignty lies in the understanding that its foundation is an independent and sovereign educational system, which is reflected in the state's definition of the state higher education policy. The criteria for "educational sovereignty" of a state include: the right to make decisions, including those related to education, without external interference; full control over its educational institutions, programmes, curricula, and methodologies; and the development of an educational policy framework that aligns with national interests, values, culture, and the needs of its citizens, businesses, and the state. The capacity to reproduce scientific and value-based potential that is crucial for maintaining a stable political system is the main reason

accounting for the state's profound interest in the educational system and sovereign higher education being prioritised.

The empirical basis of the study comprises of analytical reports, materials from reports and monitoring on the state higher education policy by the Russian and foreign executive authorities (that includes national projects such as 'Education' and 'Science and Universities', as well as the 'Priority-2030' programme), programmes aimed at attracting foreign students (i.e.: the UK government's Chevening programme, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Copernicus scholarship programme, Fulbright programme of the American government, The Austrian Science Fund (FWF), the EU Erasmus programme, UNESCO scholarship programmes), Internet resources (such as Open Education, Webinar.ru, BigBlueButton, Coursera), data from sociological surveys conducted by Russian Public Opinion Research Centre, data from international and Russian ranking systems (such as Times Higher Education World University Rankings, Project 5-100), mass media articles, speeches of politicians and experts.

The normative and legal basis of the study is represented by normative and legal documents and acts of the Soviet Union and Russia (the Constitution of the Russian Federation, federal laws, decrees by the Russian President, resolutions of the Russian Government, orders, resolutions, and directives of federal executive authorities, etc.), international treaties, as well as agreements of international organizations (Conventions, Declarations, etc.).

The theoretical significance of the study lies in the fact that its results demonstrate new approaches to the scientific study of state educational policies. The findings can serve as a foundation for theoretical developments in the fields of political science, state policy and management, sociology, history and pedagogy of higher education, and psychology. The analysis of the SHEP at the given stage provides a theoretical basis that can be used to identify trends in the overall higher education system development and to make political and administrative decisions improving and implementing educational policy in the Russian higher education system.

The practical significance of the study lies in its potential to serve as a valuable tool for evaluating the outcomes of state higher education policy and for formulating recommendations aimed at enhancing the higher education system. These recommendations can be employed by state institutions tasked with shaping and implementing the state educational policy, including the relevant committee of the Russian State Duma, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, the National Accreditation Agency in Education, and the Federal Service for Supervision in Education and Science (also known as Rosobrnadzor). Additionally, the findings of this research can be integrated into academic courses within disciplines such as 'Political Science', 'State and Municipal Administration', and 'Political Management', thereby contributing to the advancement of knowledge and practice in these fields.

The logic and structure of the work are determined by the set goals, objectives, and methodological features. The dissertation includes: an introduction, two chapters with three sections each, a conclusion, a bibliography, and two appendices.

Research approbation. The main results of the dissertation are reflected in the author's published papers, including the following articles reviewed by the Higher Attestation Commission under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation:

1. Drozdova E.V., Kirsanova E.M. (2021). Implementation of Educational Policy in Higher School in Modern Russia in the Context of Distance Learning: Contradictions and Conflicts. *Conflictology*, 16(3), 126–134.
2. Drozdova E.V. (2022). Operationalization of the Term "Educational Policy" in Russian and English research. *Political Science Issues*, 7(83), 2289–2298.
3. Biryukova I.A., Drozdova E.V. (2022). State Educational Policy in Higher School in the Russian Federation in Light of Institutional Changes 30 Years After the Collapse of the USSR. *Issues of National and Federal Relations*, 12(12), 4561–4570. DOI: 10.35775/PSI.2022.93.12.018. EDN: FISRXR.

4. Drozdova E.V. (2023). The Influence of the Soviet and Post-Soviet Education System on the Formation of Modern State Educational Policy in Higher Education in the Russian Federation. *Issues of National and Federal Relations*, 13(3), 1071–1081.

5. Drozdova E.V. (2023). Problems of Inequality in Domestic Higher Education in Modern Russia. *Ethnosocium and Interethnic Culture*, 4(178), 9–18.

The research papers published in other science magazines:

6. Drozdova E.V. (2020). Evolution of Educational Policy in the Dynamics of Social Development. *Youth World Politic*, 1, 45–49.

7. Ivanko N.A., Drozdova E.V. (2023). The Implementation of Digital Technologies in Russian Higher Education: Experience and Perspective. *In Opportunities and Threats of a Digital Society: Proceedings of the All-Russian Scientific and Practical Conference* (pp. 437–446). Yaroslavl: Filigran.

Approval of the research results was carried out by the author through participation in international and all-Russian scientific conferences:

1. Online Technologies in Higher Education in Russia Before and After COVID-19: Presentation / First International E-Conference The World in the Age of Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Period. Poznań, Poland, May 21, 2020.

2. Educational Policy in Higher Education Amid COVID-19: Presentation / X International Scientific E-Conference Youth Policy: World Historical Experience and Contemporary Issues. Cheboksary – Poznań – Moscow, June 1–2, 2020.

3. Implementation of Russian Educational Policy in the Context of Total Distance Learning: Contradictions and Conflicts: Presentation / V Saturday Political Science Readings at the Presidential Academy Modern Conflicts in Russia and the World: Causes, Features, and Consequences. RANEPa, Moscow, April 17, 2021.

4. The Concept of "Educational Policy" in Domestic and English-Language Research: Presentation / First Moscow Political Science Forum at RANEPa Political Science Today: Interdisciplinary Approaches. RANEPa, Moscow, April 15–16, 2022.

5. State Educational Policy: From the USSR to Modern Russia: Presentation / VII Saturday Political Science Readings at the Presidential Academy What Comes After Socialism and the USSR? 30 Years Later. RANEPa, Moscow, September 24, 2022.

6. Tasks of State Educational Policy in the Context of Shaping Historical Memory Among Russian Youth: Presentation / 1st All-Russian Scientific and Practical Youth Conference Spiritual and Moral Values of Russian Youth: History and Modernity. RANEPa, Moscow, December 9, 2022.

7. Strategic Challenges of State Educational Policy in the Russian Federation Under New Institutional Conditions in Modern Russia: Presentation / VIII Saturday Political Science Readings at the Presidential Academy Political Science in the Modern World: New Realities and New Research Paradigms. February 25, 2023.

8. Introduction of Online Technologies in Higher Education: Experience and Prospects: Presentation / VI Annual All-Russian Scientific and Practical Conference Opportunities and Threats of a Digital Society. P.G. Demidov Yaroslavl State University, Yaroslavl, April 20–21, 2023.

The structure of the dissertation. The research consists of an introduction, two chapters (six paragraphs overall), a conclusion, a reference list, and three appendices.