

# Moscow School of Political Studies

The programme which was evaluated is a joint programme between the European Commission and the Council of Europe implemented by the Moscow School of Political Studies. Its aim is to strengthen democratic institutions and civil society in the Russian Federation through civic education of young, regional, political and public leaders in democratic values, rule of law, human rights, federalism and self-government. Other objectives are:

- to create an active network of young political and public leaders from all over Russia and other neighbouring countries.
- to disseminate information among the Russian regions about modern political and social development and relations between the European Union, other European institutions and the Russian Federation.
- to make the Moscow School for Political Studies a lasting, substantial and well-governed institution.

The project activities include the organisation of several regional and thematic seminars, publications and the organisation of the annual meeting of the School Alumni Association.

The School was established in January 1992, at a time when Russia had just entered a period of radical economic and political reforms. A newly emerging political elite aspired to build a new Russia based on Western liberal values. Yet it had little real understanding of those values and no place to turn to learn. The context in which the School operates has changed over the last decade. While Russia's leadership still formally aspires to build a democratic Russia, it is not at all clear that a process of democratisation is ongoing in today's Russia.

## Evaluation questions and methodology

The EC called for a review of the relevance and design, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, institutional development and sustainability of the School's projects and the visibility of the European Union and Council of Europe.

**This evaluation was carried out by Dace Kasava, Yelena Rusakova and Diederik Lohman and finished September 2003**

The evaluation team had discussions with programme managers at the European Commission and the Council of Europe, individual and focus group interviews with School staff, stakeholders, current and former participants and experts, and observation of a July 2003 seminar.

Most interviews with the School's staff, participants, experts, board members, alumni, stakeholders and representatives of civil society were carried out on a one-to-one basis. The team also conducted several focus groups with five participants each time to observe discussion among participants on the values and substance of the School, its methodology and its effect on participants.

## Relevance and design

The Moscow School of Political Studies (MSPS, hereinafter: the School) was created in 1992 to promote such values and concepts as democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law and civil society among an emerging political and public elite in a country in the early stages of transition from communism to democracy. The School pursues this goal through a yearly series of seminars, a publication programme, a website and an alumni association. It seeks to stimulate discussion and reflection on these topics among its target audience of young political and public leaders from Russia's regions.

The core activity of the School, its seminars, seems carefully designed to achieve a synergy between a young and talented group of participants and top Russian and foreign experts, and ensure the formation of a strong networks among participants. The School has designed other activities, including its publication programme, website and Alumni Association, to provide its participants and alumni with further information on the concepts it promotes and to support networking. Both the forum for discussion and horizontal networks provided for by the design of the School appear unique in Russia today.

## Effectiveness

The School's seminars are effective in that the School manages to select high-quality participants and experts, seminar curricula appear in sync with the needs of the participants and participants universally state that they learn a lot at the seminars. Yet, selection procedures are currently not easily accessible for people without existing links to the School, which creates the impression of a closed, elitist 'club'. The number of participants at seminars is so large that their effectiveness risks being undermined. The School uses an old-fashioned teaching methodology (lectures followed by questions and answers at plenary sessions). The introduction of more interactive methods could improve the effectiveness of the seminars.

Judging by the feedback from alumni and participants, the publication programme fulfils its internal function – providing the School's alumni with continuing food for thought and a sense of continued belonging – effectively. Its external function – bringing the School's ideals to a larger public – is not pursued to its full extent. In particular, many publications are not yet accessible in full on the School's website.

The School's website and Alumni Association both have the potential to become effective tools in pursuing the School's mission. However, much of this potential remains unrealised. The School revamped its website in 2002 and the number of hits per month has grown. Yet the website is not an effective 'business card' to the outside world, as it is inhospitable to outsiders, which reinforces the notion of the School as a 'closed club'. The website also does not support the School's network as effectively as it could, although some improvements have been made in this area. Little strategic thinking about the role of the Alumni Association appears to have been done. As a result, elementary steps to support networking of the School's alumni have not been taken.

*This summary is from an evaluation commissioned by the European Commission on projects financed in the field of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) with the aim to promote and support human rights and democracy in third countries.*

*Information on activities and actions can be found on the EIDHR website:*

*[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/eidhr/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/eidhr/index_en.htm)*

*The views expressed in this summary do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.*

## Impact

It is impossible to measure the School's impact on the democratisation of Russian society on a macro level because too many extraneous factors influence democratisation processes. On a micro level, the School has made an impact on several levels. The School has helped alumni, in their own opinion, grow professionally and thus has a lasting influence on their work in democratic institutions around Russia. The School's network, unique of its kind in Russia, has empowered alumni with a broad base of support that may have helped improve legislation and other initiatives of the alumni. The School did not manage to achieve a uniform level of understanding of all concepts it promotes among all its participants and alumni. In particular, understanding of the concept of civil society was found to be weak.

The School has inspired several alumni to organise their own non-governmental organisations that promote democratic values, including organisations that replicate the School's model. The evaluators did not have the mandate or opportunity to evaluate the functioning of these schools but note that the Moscow School's success has been a combination of a sound design and the personal capabilities of its Director – a factor that cannot be replicated.

The indicators specified by the School to measure impact were found to be generally weak, badly formulated and sometimes not particularly relevant. In future, the indicators should be drafted in a way that makes them a useful evaluation tool. This tool could consist of both qualitative and quantitative indicators.

## Efficiency

The School appears to have made efficient use of the money it received through the Joint Programme. The costs of individual activities appeared well within the industrial norm. The School has shown good organisational skills running large and logistically complicated seminars. It has diligently reported on its activities and expenditure. The Council of Europe (CoE) was closely involved in overseeing the School's functioning.

The resources provided for under the Joint Programme have been sufficient to carry out the planned activities, contingent on significant additional contributions from other donors.

## Institutional assessment

For years, growth in the School's activity has outpaced institutional development. As a result, the existing structure of the School, strongly centred around its director, is unlikely to be able to meet the organisational and fundraising demands required by the current level of activities. This is particularly true as, in order to secure long-term financial sustainability, the School will have to make a transition from a small number of large donors to a large number of small donors. With funds from the UK government, the UK-based organisation, Democracy International, has helped the School draft a business plan for 2002-2008 that addresses some of the institutional bottlenecks. The plan is being implemented but progress has been slow. The evaluators feel the School needs a professional manager to relieve the School's directors from the operational burden.

## Sustainability

Current withdrawal of European Commission funding would have far-reaching consequences for the School. It is unlikely that the School would be able to find funding to replace the grant and, as a result, it would not be able to maintain the current level of activities.

## Visibility

In its activities, the School consistently gives visibility to the European Union institutions and the Council of Europe, in the form of references in materials it produces, speakers and a EU flag at seminars and a link on the website. Participants and alumni alike were well aware of the support both organisations give to the School.

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