



RUSSIAN SCIENCE

New Rules on Foreign Contacts Resurrect Cold War–Era Distrust

MOSCOW—Is it a benign measure to protect Russian scientists from unwittingly revealing state secrets, or a chilling return to Soviet-style authoritarianism? Debate is swirling over a sweeping directive from the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) that requires its 55,000 researchers to report any international activities and contacts to the academy's governing presidium.

The directive, stamped “for internal use only,” has an eye-catching title: “The Academy of Sciences’ action plan to avoid any harm to the Russian state in the sphere of economic and scientific cooperation.” It orders “specialist departments” and institute chiefs to analyze “international agreements signed by scientific bodies in order to prevent the transmission abroad of information concerning national security.” It also calls for “strengthening controls on articles being prepared and the exchange of information with foreign countries” in order “not to permit the publication abroad of unauthorized information.”

News of the directive was first divulged on *Echo Moskvy* radio by prominent human rights campaigner Sergey Kovalyov. He reported that the directive requires researchers at the 357 RAS institutes to file reports on all international grant applications, articles sent for publication abroad, travel to international conferences, and the activities of foreign colleagues who visit Russian labs. Kovalyov

charged that the directive is yet another sign of Russia's transformation into a “police state.” The Kremlin moved quickly to dismiss that allegation. Deputy Prime Minister Valentina Matviyenko, quoted by the ITAR-TASS news agency, called the charge “groundless.”

It's hard to know whom to believe. It is unclear how institutes will implement the directive, how the presidium plans to use the information, or in what instances foreign activities will be reported to the KGB's successor agency, the Federal Security Service (FSB). The undefined scope of the FSB's involvement worries researchers, who are already more prudent in the wake of several high-profile cases in which the FSB relied on an ambiguous reading of what constitutes a state secret to level accusations against Russian researchers and an American technology specialist (*Science*, 10 March 2000, p. 1729, and 15 December 2000, p. 2043).

Physicist Mikhail Feigelman of the prestigious Landau Institute of Theoretical Physics in Moscow takes a dark view. He charged last week on *Echo Moskvy* that the directive may be a thinly veiled attempt to allow the FSB to exert more control over the scientific community, such as by barring publication of certain articles in foreign journals or by preventing certain researchers from traveling abroad or seeking Western grants. If these fears prove true for scientists not involved in classified research, he said, a research establishment already crippled by a massive brain drain in the early 1990s could suffer further losses. “I'll stop persuading my students to stay in Russia,” he said.

Other prominent researchers see merit in the new rules and discount a return of Soviet-style controls. “The old system of secrecy with all its draw-

backs and idiotic features is ruined today,” says Leonid Bezrukov, deputy head of the RAS Institute for Nuclear Research in Moscow. But that may result in secrets being leaked inadvertently, he says, and in that respect, the directive “is very useful, as a scientist cannot always understand what is secret and what is not.” Clearing submissions to foreign journals, he adds, could offer protection if the FSB chose to investigate someone's activities. He notes that scientists have left themselves particularly vulnerable



Police state? Deputy Prime Minister Matviyenko (right) rejects activist Kovalyov's dark view of academy directive.

by Internet postings; these, too, must be cleared under the new rules.

Resolving the intent of the directive is challenging, in part, because the presidium has not revealed where the order originated. Several RAS institute heads contacted by *Science* speculate that the FSB is the source. Others trace the initiative to the presidium, which is increasingly asserting its authority over the institutes in the run-up to elections this autumn that will usher in a new RAS president for the first time in 10 years. RAS scientific secretary Nikolai Plate responds that the directive's aim is solely to remind scientists to guard intellectual property. “There are no attempts to restrict the freedom of Russian scientists to contact scientists from other countries,” he says.

Most scientists are warily watching how institutes interpret the directive, which is supposed to be implemented this month, and how aggressively it's enforced. “It might be a completely harmless document,” Alexandr Berlin, director of the RAS Institute of Chemical Physics in Moscow, says hopefully. Then again, he notes, “it might be something much more serious.”

—VLADIMIR POKROVSKY AND ELENA KOKURINA

Vladimir Pokrovsky and Elena Kokurina are writers in Moscow.



Back to the future. Critics charge that the academy's futuristic building may house Soviet-era thinking.

CREDITS: (LEFT TO RIGHT) RICHARD STONE, AP PHOTO/PAVIN MARMUR, AP PHOTO/DIMITRY LOVETSKY