

Russian scholars under state's eye

Must report contact with foreigners

By Geoffrey York
TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL

MOSCOW — In an ominous revival of a Soviet-era rule, more than 900,000 Russian scholars have been ordered to submit reports on their contacts with foreigners.

The move is the latest expansion in the power of the Russian security agencies, which have become increasingly influential since former KGB agent Vladimir Putin became Russian president last year.

In Soviet times, all travel by scholars and scientists was carefully controlled, and they were forced to inform their bosses about any contacts with foreigners. Their written reports were reviewed by the KGB.

The practice stopped when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, but now it is being revived through a May 24 directive titled "The Academy of Sciences Action Plan to Prevent Damage to the Russian State in the Spheres of Economic and Scientific Cooperation."

Russian parliamentarian Sergei Kovalyov, a Soviet-era dissident who disclosed the document to the Russian media last week, said the directive is evidence that Russia is now "a police state" where the former KGB has seized power.

"What seems dangerous to me is that this directive is quite in line with current Kremlin policy," he told a Moscow radio station.

The Russian government immediately denied the existence of any new policy on foreign-academic contacts, but several institutes soon confirmed it. Some researchers said they were unhappy at the new restrictions.

A rising wave of spy charges has swept through Russia in recent months, with secret trials of Russians and foreigners on espionage charges. Many scholars are worried by the closed trial of arms-control expert Igor Sutyagin on spying charges. He has said he collected his information from open sources, primarily the media. Some academics

say his jailing is a warning to scholars to avoid foreign contacts and sensitive subjects.

The Russian Academy of Sciences includes dozens of research institutes with 910,000 scholars and scientists as registered members. In the past two weeks, several institutes said they were visited by top academy officials, who ordered them to submit regular reports on their foreign travel, conferences, laboratory visits by foreigners, articles in foreign journals, international cooperation agreements and acceptance of foreign grants.

They were also ordered to introduce strict security measures for their use of the Internet and other international computer networks.

One research institute in Moscow, the Institute for General Genetics, issued a memo ordering employees to report on their contacts with foreigners by June 1.

"Soon there will be no unclassified subjects left," the Moscow newspaper Vremya MN warned. "The directive will have a negative effect on contacts between Russian researchers and foreigners. . . . Some of them will certainly disagree to work under the First Department, the former KGB, and contacts with some others will be banned by the secret services themselves."

Tatyana Shaumian, a scholar at the Institute of Oriental Studies, said the Soviet-era policy on foreign contacts is easy to revive because the old rules were never officially canceled.

"In the past, everyone who went on a foreign trip had to file a report on how they spent their time," she said.

"I remember having to write very long reports. In the 1990s, this practice more or less disappeared. For 10 years nobody has been preparing these reports, and now we have to do it again.

"New people are in power, and they're trying to change things."

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Russian scholars worry that President Vladimir Putin is returning to his KGB agent roots by cracking down on their contact with foreigners. AP