

From teachers to researchers: changing priorities of academic profession in post-Soviet countries

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The post-Soviet transition period has brought about significant changes in the academic profession across the countries of the former Soviet Union. This study aims to explore the evolution of the academic profession during this transformative period, with a particular emphasis on the role of research activities in the work of teaching staff at higher education institutions. Building upon previous research on post-Soviet transformations (Huisman, Frumin, Smolentseva, 2018; Chakseliani, Fedyukin, Frumin, 2022), this study is grounded in a theoretical framework that incorporates theories of transition, higher education stratification, and research capacity.

The methodology employed in this study involves an empirical analysis of 13 countries of the former Soviet Union, incorporating a diverse range of higher education institutions and academic disciplines. Data sources include interviews with university administrators, faculty members, and policy experts, as well as a comprehensive analysis of relevant policy documents and archival materials. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of the complex dynamics at play in shaping the academic profession during the post-Soviet transition.

The analysis reveals a noticeable shift in the balance of responsibilities for academics, as research has increasingly been prioritized alongside teaching duties. This development has been driven by a number of factors, including the globalization of higher education, the influence of international university rankings, and the pursuit of research excellence by national governments and institutions in the region. However, in most cases, these external factors were not supported by relevant resources and capacity building. As a result, there was a significant growth of imitation of research activities, leading to concerns about research quality and integrity.

The study also identifies the persistence of certain Soviet-era legacies in the academic profession, such as a lack of peer-review practices and weak links with global science. For instance, in some post-Soviet countries, national academic journals still follow outdated publication norms and do not adhere to international standards, limiting the global impact and recognition of research conducted in these countries.