Critical reflection on the new mission of the Library for foreign literature

“Enhancing human capital to integrate people into the global agenda” – that’s what the recently introduced mission of the Library for foreign literature states. The library aims to reach that global target splitting it into successive stages:

1. providing access to information

2. contributing to language-learning and thus increasing the awareness

3. facilitating intercultural communication

4. participating in international projects

5. finally integrating people into the global cooperation.

Quite ground- breaking, especially for Russia.

However, I would outline seemingly minor shortcomings that might lead to major consequences.

Firstly, when talking about the stages we assume that those who reach the final one are intelligent and talented people. This is where the first problem arises – once the integration is completed the majority of these people might aspire to emigrate. In other words, the good intention of enhancing human capital to integrate people into the global agenda might result in the brain drain that our Government fights against so fiercely.

Secondly, while the library organizes over 2000 events per year, all of them are censored. For instance, I doubt that it is allowed to lecture on LGBT-community, feminism or civil rights that are nowadays an integral part of the European society pronounced in art, literature, music, festivals etc. Neither is it possible to touch upon Russia-America relations and sanctions in particular. The result is that visitors have partial knowledge about what happens in the world while it is essential to see the whole picture. The omission of a series of issues might create an unrealistic image of the external world and lead to a culture shock and misunderstanding when a person comes to a country and faces the reality.

Thirdly, one of the targets set by the library is promoting Russian culture abroad. However, there is Rossotrudnichestvo that has been established for this very purpose. For example, Russian centre for science and culture in Spain has its own library with the books of Russian authors, systematically organizes cultural events and lectures, gives classes of Russian language and even has its own theatre and choir in Russian. So, the library can hardly compete with the federal institution whose mission is mainly about promoting Russian culture and facilitating intercultural communication.

Another point questions whether one needs a library to get involved into the global agenda. The best source of information to discover foreign cultures has already been invented. The Internet. One can watch an opera in La Scala, listen to Oprah Winfrey’s speech, chat in InterPals, learn languages and read books without going out of their apartment. Why go to the library for it if simple ownership of a computer gives access to whatever you need?

Last but not least, should people really focus on the global agenda if the majority is unaware of our country’s agenda? There are so many problems to solve, there is our own cultural heritage to preserve and our own languages to learn. For example, our regional languages and cultures are on the brink of extinction. People living in those regions opt for learning English that is spoken all over the world rather than Udmurt, for example. As a result, cultures are dying, peoples are forgetting their mother tongues. Even I am writing this essay in English mainly because it is now easier for me to express my opinion in a foreign language than in my native one. Shall we aggravate the situation further by integrating people into global agenda?

To recap, the new mission of the library is relevant. However, integrating Russian people into the global agenda is rather difficult for a federal institution as it is to follow the instructions of the Government and operate in accordance with certain rules. Moreover, the library will have to compete with organizations and inventions that serve for the same purposes. I still believe that it is possible to tackle partially the problems outlined above but it will require more efforts and indirect methods.

 Anastasiia Prokopenko