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Saint Petersburg State University is the cofounder and the Russian Federation's first representative in the Global MOOC Alliance. The creation of the Alliance was first mentioned at the World online conference "Learning Revolution and Higher Education Conference" that was held in Beijing on 9 - 11th of December, 2020.

The Global MOOC Alliance - is the non-profit partnership of universities, online educational platforms, and international public organizations. The initiative of the Alliance creation belongs to the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE) and the Tsinghua University of China. Participation of SPBU in the institution of the Global MOOC Alliance is a great honor for the University, and it means the global recognition of the SPBU achievements in the development of online education.

Founders of the Global MOOC Alliance are: the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE), the Tsinghua University of China, three major online educational platforms — XuetangX, Thai MOOC and edX, and universities developing and exploiting massive open online courses.

XuetangX is the Chinese national online educational platform that is the biggest in the world, and where more than 3100 online courses with more than 228 million listeners are placed. edX is one of the biggest global online open-source platforms founded by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University in May 2012. Nowadays, it has more than 2800 online courses with an audience of 100 million listeners. Learning management systems, based on the open-source platform solution base Open edX, are very popular and are used to support the educational process. SPBU's online educational platform open.sbp.ru is also based on the Open edX technology base. Thai MOOC is the Thailand Cyber University (Thaicyperu, TCU) project that gathered more than 100 partners and presented 472 online courses.

Universities presented in the Global MOOC Alliance are the leaders in their regions. Thus, Cornell University (USA), being a member of the Ivy League, is one of the most famous USA universities. Nanyang Technological University (Singapore) is in 11th place in the world and 3rd place in Asia in the QS World University Rankings 2020. Polytechnic University of Milan (POLIMI) took 16th place among all technical universities in the world according to the Top Universities rating, made by the Times Higher Education. Now POLIMI is in 2nd place among European partner universities of the Coursera platform by the number of its online courses. University of Nairobi (Kenya) (in top-10 African universities) is the online education leader in the African region and the initiator of the African online platform creation. University of Toronto (Canada) is the leader in higher education in Canada according to Times; online course of the University "Mind Control: Managing Your Mental Health During COVID-19, presented on the biggest worldwide online platform Coursera, is one of the most popular online courses in Canada (almost 140 000 people signed up for the course), and it's another online course on Coursera "Programming basics" is in top-100 courses of 2020 (more than 220 000 signed up for the course).

Nikolay Kropachev, the rector of Saint Petersburg State University, addressed participants of the first Global MOOC Alliance online conference with a welcome speech. Among others, he described the SPBU experience in the online education development before the COVID-10 pandemic and after its beginning,

when SPBU could efficiently adapt to the new conditions and remain the teaching quality at the highest level. Rector mentioned the main conclusions formulated in SPBU under the pandemic conditions.

“In the context of the pandemic, the educational process with the use of information and communication technologies allows, on the one hand, to use the knowledge, experience, talent, and creative potential of teachers, and, on the other hand, to implement achievements of the informatization into the educational activity. The digital format doesn’t disclaim the quality of University education. Developed as a result of the pandemic situation in the world showed how much the academic community needs cooperation.” The academic community needs to develop national and international cooperation, an insufficient level of which was highlighted by the pandemic. In matters of online education, the consolidation of efforts is needed. That's the reason why we decided to join the Global MOOC Alliance, the organization that, without a doubt, will become a center of cooperation and distribution of advanced teaching practices.”, - Nikolay Kropachev said.

He also noted that SPBU has been cooperating with China for a long time: among SPBU partners there are more than 50 organizations from the People’s Republic of China and 30 companies with Chinese capitals. In the list of SPBU partners are the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People’s Republic of China, the Tsinghua University of China (THU), Peking University, Fudan University, Harbin Institute of Technology (HIT), technology company Huawei and other organizations. “I’m sure the Global MOOC Alliance will become an effective platform for our further cooperation with Chinese partners, and no external factors, including pandemic, will be able to slow it down”, — the rector of SPBU added.

Minister of Education of the People’s Republic of China Chen Baosheng, while performing at the conference, noted that PRC today is the world leader by the number of MOOCs. He informed that China has more than 30 major online platforms with access to 34 thousand online courses. Almost 450 million learners listen to these courses, and now it’s the most numerous online course auditorium in the world. Chen Baosheng highlighted that one of the purposes of the Global MOOC Alliance’s creation is to enhance opportunities for access to Chinese educational products. “ We created the Global MOOC Alliance to improve the quality of our courses and to give learners all over the world access to them”, — Chen Baosheng noted.

The Minister also added the Alliance’s creation was directed for increasing the level of knowledge availability and global development of continuing education that can last for a lifetime. “Education is not a privilege of classrooms and books. Arrays of knowledge from the internet that give people more educational opportunities replaced it”, — Chen Baosheng marked.

One of the initiators of the Global MOOC Alliance’s creation and the conference organization is Tsinghua University that is SPBU’s longtime partner. Tsinghua University President Qiu Yong, performing at the conference, marked that modern educational organizations need to develop the principle of openness. “Greater openness will help us to overcome physical and technological borders and cultural differences and will allow us to share educational resources of better quality with learners all over the world in a more efficient and easier way. Universities with greater openness will achieve equal opportunities in education faster than they did before, they will develop continuing education and will promote cooperation and exchanges with more inclusiveness and more broad vision”, — Qiu Yong highlighted.

Assistant UNESCO Director-General for Education Stefania Giannini in her welcome speech to the conference participants also noted the importance of online education development for increasing

access to knowledge. She highlighted that principles of inclusion, equality, and quality must come to the fore, and every educational platform or resource has to follow these principles.

At the same time, she noted the education can't go online completely and pandemic, surprisingly, proved it. "Let's be honest: we learned one important lesson from a pandemic — a learner needs his teacher. Cooperation between people and live communication is still the basis of the educational process. We have to develop a new relationship type: between technologies, teachers, and learners, to avoid the digital "gap" and not to fall out of modernity. Teachers have to develop their professional skills in this direction, find new ways to fight these challenges" — Stefania Giannini emphasized.

All Global Alliance participants supported the adoption of the 2020 Beijing Declaration on MOOC Development. Note that SPBU is rightfully considered as the leader in the online education sphere: SPBU is one of the founders of the Russian online platform "Open Education" and takes 1st place by the number of courses posted there — 146 courses out of 663. Platform audience — 7 million people, almost 2 million of them are SPBU online courses' listeners.

Besides that, University today takes 1st place among all European universities and 3rd place in the world (after Google Cloud (USA) and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA)) by the number of online courses posted on the international educational platform Coursera. Two years ago, SPBU became the first and still the only Russian university, whose online courses are posted on the Chinese largest platform XuetangX.

For information:

One of the purposes of the Global MOOC Alliance is to build a global community interested in the exchange of educational resources of the highest quality. The Alliance will promote MOOCs and best teaching practices in online education and develop international cooperation of leaders in the sphere of innovative educational technologies. The Alliance's work will focus on the realization of one key purpose of the UN-defined global sustainable development — ensuring education's equality and accessibility and providing opportunities for continuing education.