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Information Policy of Local Governments in Russia

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The object of this research is to assess the public availability of information on local governments in Russia, to identify the main barriers to increasing public access to government information, and consider the alternatives for local governments in developing their interfaces with citizens. The focus of the paper has been directed at the uses for the Internet as a faster and more efficient tool for improving governance, with a variety of resources for engaging citizens in the policies that affect their lives.

The research paper is divided into four parts. The first part provides an analysis of FOI legislation in Russia and the legal framework for public access to local government information. The second part describes practices utilized in providing information. The third part covers the progress in promotion of the e-government model in Russia, as well as main barriers to the comprehensive use of this model. Finally, the fourth part includes research findings.

Introduction

In order for citizens to fully take part in the public affairs of their society, the actions and decision-making processes of their local governments must be open and transparent, and information must be clearly provided. Information outlays are an essential element of good government, while corrupt governments thrive on secrecy, inefficiency, and waste. Clear and comprehensive information allows people to scrutinize the actions of a government and is the basis for proper, informed debate of those actions.

International business practice requires publicly traded companies to furnish management, financial, and business policies on a regular basis so that investors will be able to make informed decisions. The equivalent in the public sector, requiring that administrations disseminate their practices and policies on ongoing activities, remains a challenge for governments throughout the world.

General Overview of the Legislation on Freedom of Information in Russia

Freedom of Information Right

The term “right” has many referents and shades of meaning. There are, broadly speaking, two distinct ways to approach the subject: moral and descriptive. The first associates rights with moral principles and ideals. From a philosophical perspective, this method is inherently subjective, ordering judgment of the most necessary and important.

A second approach to rights is more descriptive and less evaluative. Within this perspective, a vested interest qualifies as a right under and effective legal system, using collective resources to defend it.

Organizing rights into two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive groups, a distinction is usually drawn between negative rights and positive rights. Negative rights typically protect liberty; positive rights typically promote equality. If negative rights shelter us from the government, then positive rights grant us services by the government.

Freedom of information rights in a country with a strong legal system belongs to the group of positive rights. Presently however, Russia is still in the process of transforming freedom of information rights, along with other constitutional rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of movement, from a mere declaration and promise into a legally enforced act.

Federal Legislation on Freedom of Information

The Russian Constitution of 1993 grants rights to freedom of information under Article 29. Seventeen other articles of the Constitution additionally mention it in various contexts.

The most important law ensuring provision of the freedom for information right - a law on right to information – was drafted and submitted to the Federal Duma in 1996. Since then it has lingered under Duma review. Recent attempts of interest groups to reinvigorate public debate on the important draft law have attracted attention of politicians, and the draft review was included into the agenda of the Federal Duma for the winter 2002.

Why the Federal Law on State Secrets was approved by the Duma in 1993 without long discussions is self-explanatory. Article 5 of the law provides the list of exceptions in disclosing public information. A refusal to disclose information could take place only if disclosure of the information would cause substantial harm to the following legitimate aims: national defense, national security, public safety, and the effectiveness and integrity of government decision-making processes. The law also obliges a public body to provide a justification for the refusal to disclose information and show that the disclosure of the information will cause substantial harm to that legitimate aim. If an individual requesting the information does not agree with the justification, he might appeal to court. In practice, however, the procedure has not been applied so legitimately.

In the absence of the law on right to information, the basic laws regulating the processes of gathering and providing information remains the Federal Law on Information and Information Protection of 1995. The law declares that the state-owned information resources remain open and accessible. Information coded for limited access includes confidential information and state secret information. It is forbidden to limit access to the information covering legislation and activities of government bodies, including the level of self-governments, environmental and other data important for life safety, and other information of public interest.

In general, the legal framework regulating the provision of public access to information and promoting ICTs for this purposes, is still under creation. For effective citizen/ government information exchange, the following categories of laws need to be ratified and implemented comprehensively (currently under review or to be developed in the nearest future):

Law On Commercial Secret Information.

Law On Personal Information.

Law On Electronic Signature (passed two hearings in the Duma).

Law On Electronic Commerce.

Law On State Informational Standards and Norms.

The International Center Against Censorship ARTICLE 19, a London-based organization that takes its name and purpose from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has produced a set of international principles that set out standards for national and international legislation giving effect to the right to freedom of information. While the principles are designed primarily for national legislation on freedom of information or access to official information, they are also applicable to information held by local governmental bodies. The Principles are based on international and regional law and standards, evolving state practice (as reflected, inter alia, in national laws and judgments of national courts) and the general principles of law recognized by the community of nations. A Russian partner of the ARTICLE 19, the Glasnost Defense Foundation, has recently started an assessment of the national FOI legislation in terms of international standards and norms. The second part of this paper will consider the effects of identifiable discrepancies on local legislation and practices.

Stephen Holms, in his treatise *The Cost of Rights*, notes that rights arise where norms and duties fail. When beneficial social norms are capable self-enforcing entities for the protection of citizen rights, legal regulations often prove to be unnecessary or repetitive. When public access to government information is a social norm, legislation to reaffirm these principles might seem puzzling and unnecessary. Russian norms today, however, do not support such freedoms as understood rights, and requires the force of law to engender their growth.

Federal Legislation Regulating the Provision of Official Information on the Local Level

Since 1995, when the Federal Law on Local Self-government was adopted, the emphasis on the development of local self-government in Russia has brought tangible results. The administration has reviewed and rated the competence levels of municipal government agents in government, and local governments have since become an independent branch of power. There are approximately 12,000 municipal entities in Russia today.

The federal law on Local Self-government of 1995, which established the foundation for such government activities, did not focus on issues of responsibility and dialogue between local governments and their citizens. The issue first appeared in legal documents only later, when in 1999 The Concept on the State Policy on the Self-Government Development in Russia was approved, setting forth the goal of creating effective system of interaction between local governments and residents. In order to follow this goal, The Federal Long-Term Program on the State Support to Local Governments was introduced later that year. The aim of this program was to create municipal information systems to ensure increased citizen awareness and participation in local government, as well as to augment the effectiveness of local governments.

The most advanced draft law focusing on the mechanisms of interactions between local governments and citizens has of yet not been approved by the Duma. The draft Law on Basic Guarantees of Citizens Rights in Self-Governance was submitted to the Duma in 2000. The draft law specifies the obligations of local governments to provide comprehensive and reliable information on the economic, social, and political situation within municipal entities. Article 14 of this draft law obliges local governments to publish the following information related to the formation and implementation of local budgets: forecasts for economic and social development for an upcoming year, budget and taxation policies, investment programs, information on

municipal debts, assessments of project implementation, monitoring data etc. However, this law exists only on paper, and it is unlikely that approval will come quickly.

The information provided by local administrations to citizens is inadequate without an integrated system of information for local governments providing access to the related activities of governmental and non-governmental agencies operating within their municipalities. This gap stems from bureaucratic structure problems, ensuring that entities under federal subordination, major private enterprises and others, are not obliged to provide any information they have collected to local administrations. Statistical data that are provided by federal agencies, such as the Taxation Administration, follow their own principles and standards. Private enterprises refer to “commercial secrets”. For these reasons it is critical to adopt a federal law on the performance of local government agencies. The drafting of this law is currently in process.

Local Legislation on Freedom of Information

In the absence of a federal law on information rights, some regions, including Sakhalin and Kaliningrad Oblasts, have recently initiated the development and discussion of draft regional laws on such rights. Local experts argue that these laws, obligating local officials to provide an open access to official information, as well as introducing sanctions for refusals if such, will help to develop relevant procedures to increase the accessibility of official informational resources.

Local norms and regulations concerned with an improvement in the comprehensiveness of citizen-government information exchange introduce the procedures for press-centers functioning, journalist accreditations, and municipal bidding for information services.

In general, legal frameworks regulating public access to government information in Russia, both of the federal and local levels, remains under-developed. The overwhelming grass-roots response to stalled legislation at the Federal level, however, suggests this will not continue as a fundamental barrier to effective information exchange between governments and citizens.

II. Practices in providing public access to information

The section covers accessibility of public information resources in Russia and describes the best practices in this area. Describing these practices, I use the three-level assessment approach, developed under PUMA/OECD, to evaluate relations between government and citizens. In PUMA terms, information is a one-way terminal through which government delivers information to citizens. Consultation is a two-way relation in which citizens provide feedback on issues defined by government. Participation is a partnership in which citizens actively shape policy options, but government retains the responsibility for final decisions.

Federal level

The fast development of ICTs and their growing use in public administration during the last several years has significantly quickened the pace of reform of government bodies concerning transparent and open administrative processes. Additionally, a stronger civil society has forced bureaucrats to respond to the needs of citizens in more targeted ways. Speaking cautiously, it

appears that there has been a responsive shift in the political will in the highest ranks of the Federal government toward providing open information policies.

However, according to a poll conducted by the Glasnost Defense Foundation in 2001, only 27% of surveyed citizens are satisfied with the information provided on activities of the federal government, while 35% remain unsatisfied. With regard to local government, the figures poll out at 30% and 40% respectively.

The Russian federal executive branch, consisting of 24 ministries, 6 committees, 2 commissions, 13 service offices, 8 agencies and 2 inspections (totaling 56 sections) broadly use ICTs for providing data on their activities. Published information has been posted at official web sites through the portal <http://www.government.gov.ru/>. At the moment, all the 24 federal ministries have their own Internet sites. The Ministry for Federation Affairs that is in charge of federal government support, including information support to local governments, has launched its web site just recently, in August 2001.

In general, the web information contains news, regulations, and laws related to ministry activity, biographies of key persons, and, in some cases, contact information for different departments. With few exceptions, the information does not cover services provided by the government agency, organized in accordance with the physical apparatus of the ministry than around programs within the relevant public sector.

The only federal agency providing comprehensive monitoring data is the Ministry for Finances (<http://www.minfin.ru/>). Under the IMF requirements, and in accordance with the IMF methodology, the site provides data on federal budget execution monitoring. The monthly updated information includes, but is not limited to, key economic indicators for the budget implementation, revenues and expenditures data, and data on the external debts of the Russian Federation. Monthly monitoring of budget execution by 89 subjects of the Federation has been also conducted and provided through the site. As for the budgets of municipal bodies, published budgetary data cover exclusively past years, from 1995 to 1998.

The frequency of updates of the majority of sites is very low – 11 sites are updated less than monthly, while 8 sites are updated weekly. Only four of the 24 sites are updated daily, though some are updated several times a day (data provided by the Department on Government Information).

In general, while designing the sites, federal bodies, evidently, used a model of ‘government activities’. In its research on e-Government leadership throughout the world, the company, Accenture Consulting, found that the feature is typical for an early stage of e-government presence. In its report 2001, Accenture Consulting emphasizes that this model is inefficient, and that on-line access should present relevant information to citizens, rather information on the organization of the agencies.

At present, the only Russian ministry providing service through the Internet is the Ministry for Taxes. In 2001, for the first time, it posted tax forms so that individuals could access, complete, and send their declarations electronically. However, without legislation regarding the Law on

Electronic Signature, a citizen completing tax forms through the electronic method was still required to confirm the declaration through a government tax audit.

In terms of consultations, the level of interaction between the Federal Government and local citizens is low. This observation is reflected in the site design - only six ministry sites have interactive pages where visitors can ask questions and participate in teleconferences.

The level of municipalities

Interaction between local governments and citizens at the local level differs significantly from the federal level. Local governments have much greater demand for local citizen participation in their programs. They have determined that the authorities cannot function properly with only administrative resources, particularly after the August 1998 financial crisis and the subsequent decrease of subsidies from the federal government. Local governments have also found that for the desired participation to function successfully, citizens should be fully and adequately informed on policies, programs, and daily practical activities of local governments.

Local communities are also more motivated to receive adequate information from their local governments, as this information directly affects their lives. Some categories of information that are particularly useful include environmental data, information on regulation procedures, data on funds that are available for distribution through municipal bidding, competitions for social service projects, small and medium business support schemes, and grant possibilities.

Despite mutual interest in such partnerships, there are still few channels available for comprehensive information exchange between local governments and citizens.

- ✍ Providing the information, local governments preferably use the following traditional components of municipal information system: municipal information centers, municipal libraries, and mass media. All local administrations have press unit departments, press secretaries, speakers offices or media contacts. These departments offer practical services such as the organization of press briefings and the preparation and dissemination of press releases on the basis of a mailing/telephone list or close cooperation with a limited number of journalists that specialize on local government issues.
- ✍ In general, such arrangements lack a broader scope and systematic transmission of well-designed information on government initiatives and work. They also lack any strategy to present positive or negative news, hampering trust-building measures for creating an image of the local government as the institution that effectively performs its main duties. And, most importantly, they do not provide an opportunity for citizens to give feedback on official information.
- ✍ Recently, there have been some attempts to go beyond press releases and media conferences and to create units responsible for responding to questions on a specific topic (consultations). Hotlines have been created to provide information in such areas of government activities as health services, social services, etc. In some local governments, corruption hotlines have been established to monitor illegal practices related to bribes and corruption.

Unfortunately, none of the above plans constitute any comprehensive long-term strategy in government communication to citizens.

Only few local governments began to provide open access to official information through the Internet. Even such major cities like Novosibirsk, Arkhangelsk, Pskov, and Perm are not yet running official web sites.

Information

- ✍ The most advanced sites like <http://www.admpetrozavodsk.karelia.ru/> (Petrozavodsk, the Republic of Karelia) and <http://www.openpower.ru/> (Obninsk, Kaluga Oblast) provide comprehensive information on the administrative procedures of licensing and registration for entrepreneurs, regulations on the municipal property rent and privatization, municipal tenders, and monitoring data on implementation of local budget. The Petrozavodsk site holds a ‘virtual public forum’ to improve communication between residents and local officials. The most advanced sites, as a rule, have been created and maintained by independent organizations, not by information departments within administrations themselves. The work has been conducted under a special agreement with the relevant administrations. The first site was founded under the auspices of the Karelia Institute of Applied Mathematical Research, and the non-commercial partnership Municipal Informatika administered the second.
- ✍ Other local government sites generally cover major information such as the biographies of mayors and key officials, the structure of administration departments, tourist information, historical data, local news, and, in fewer cases, statistical information on local economic and social development (<http://www.city.samara.ru/>, <http://www.tver.ru/> etc). The majority of sites provide contact information (phone numbers) of key officials.

Feedback

- ✍ Only few sites host a ‘virtual office’ where citizens can address officials and ask questions on different issues. <http://www.admin.tomsk.ru/>, <http://www.omsk.ru/> have a special section ‘Feedback’ to get questions from citizens through e-mail. Official answers to the questions have been forwarded to a sender directly. Questions and answers are published and accessible on the sites, <http://www.admpetrozavodsk.karelia.ru/> and <http://www.murman.ru/>.

Debate and advocacy

- ✍ <http://www.strategy.burg.ru/> host forums on strategic planning issues for experts, community groups and citizens. <http://www.inetforum.omsk.ru/> seeks to initiate discussions on public policy concerning the dissemination of public information.

In general, very few official sites host roundtables on topics that reflect the concerns of local communities. Citizen experiments in discussing, contacting, and lobbying their governments have proved to be much further advanced and innovative than the initiatives by local governments themselves.

- ✍ Through conducting regular roundtables and virtual forums on www.infosibe.ru/sg, the Info-Sib-Center, an NGO from Novosibirsk, has established a mechanism for public oversight of public policy decisions. Roundtables result in recommendations for legislative and executive bodies. Sib-Info-Center monitors the implementation of recommendations. The site also contains sections including: “Only the Facts” (covering local government programs, budget drafts and reports on budget implementation); “Legal Framework” (focusing on local

legislation); and an on-line discussion on anti-corruption. In addition, there is a special page asking for citizen feedback on corruption issues, which is forwarded to the proper departments of the local administration

- ✍ www.indem.ru, maintained by the INDEM (Informatics for Democracy) Foundation, created the mechanism of public control over election processes and elected officials' performance in office. An all-Russia Internet-based public oversight network was created to monitor violations during election campaigns. Since the installation of the site, over 8,000 people have visited the site, more than 1,000 messages were received, and more than 362 violations were reported. Election monitoring reports have been posted on the Internet in a moderated program, and the reported violations have been submitted directly to the Central Election Commission.
- ✍ Murmansk business managers have access to a specialized web site (<http://www.murmanweb.ru/>), which covers local administrative procedures on licensing, registration, certification, and municipal bidding.

A key area of citizen participation on the local level involves drafting local budgets and monitoring their implementation. The process began last year after the new Federal Budget Code (1998) was approved. The Code provides that budgetary information (federal and local) must be open to citizens

The Code forbids the use of the stamp, 'For official use only,' on budgetary documents.

On the sites, (<http://www.strategy-spb.ru/>, <http://www.transparentbudget.da.ru/>), civic groups push the momentum for greater transparency and openness in local budgets. The Internet tool, however, has yet to become an effective vehicle to enhance this process.

The Association of the Siberian and Far East Cities has conducted research on perceptions of the term 'budgetary transparency' by municipal officials, as well as by local community groups including journalists, NGOs, and policy experts. The research revealed that there is a discrepancy in understanding among the groups. The first group assumes that publishing information on budget data alone makes local budgets transparent. The local community groups, however, insist that, for a public budget to be transparent, more active elements like public hearings of draft budgets, public control mechanisms and monitoring over budget execution should be incorporated into the budgetary processes (<http://www.asdg.ru/>).

Montesquieu asserted that freedom could be protected only if power checks power. The French philosopher had in mind the power of state. To ensure freedom of information in contemporary societies, however, civic groups have become a sector of real power that can oblige federal and local agencies to provide information.

The following present key challenges for local governments today in Russia:

- ✍ Forming municipal information resources and linking them into a functional municipal information system. This involves major changes to the internal organizational structure of governments. To design and introduce a comprehensive municipal information system, Russian local governments, like governments of many other countries, have to transform the existing departmental model into a new networking model.
- ✍ The challenge to collate and standardize information: Wherever municipal information databases have been formed, they followed different local standards. In order to make these databases compatible, they need to be standardized.
- ✍ Relationships of public organizations to private and third-sector organizations in policy making require participating agencies to move beyond mere cooperation and coordination and toward an integrated, systemic form of engagement throughout this process. Consequently, the challenge is to deconstruct agency boundaries and to link various agencies through collaborative partnerships. While this is not an easy task, advances in technology are daily turning such distant possibilities into inevitable and necessary outcomes.
- ✍ Most critically, the challenge persists to change the purpose of municipal information resources. While today they mainly serve the purposes of those within the administration, these resources can only further the dialogue and cooperation between governing bodies and communities when these resources become active and easily accessed venues for citizens. Means must then be created to transform information from private asset of governments to public asset, using the terminology suggested by Richard Heeks in his Information Systems for Public Sector Management.

Emerging e-Government: Are There Barriers to Broadening Access of Citizens to Government Information and Services?

The digital economy creates a new set of possibilities for the information exchange between governments and citizens. Networking allows a much greater flow of information, and makes it possible to introduce new model of governance where administrations are flexible and responsive to the needs of their citizens. Such a model is embodied in the theory of the emergent e-government. The promotion of E-technologies would provide many benefits to local governments in Russia. The self-access to information within this system would streamline agencies of the government, creating a less bureaucratic and more effective apparatus. Additionally, through such venues, local administrations would be able to establish ongoing dialogue between the government and its citizenry. Such dialogue would do much to further the process of transparency reform and trust-building measures in the public sector.

The realization of such benefits, however, is dependent upon the implementation of legal methods to remove, or substantially decrease, barriers to the effective use of e-technologies in public administration, and prevent the creation of new roadblocks to such reform.

Technical barrier. Introduction of the e-government model presupposes a sufficiently high level of ICT usage by both governments, as suppliers of information services, and the citizens, as consumers of these services. In regard to such prerequisites, the question remains whether Russia

has reached such a level of activity to support the development of this model of governance, if it is too early to discuss such possibilities.

As of March 1, 2001, government agencies, both federal and local, have been equipped with more than 800,000 desktops (information provided by the Department on Government Information). Though this signals that computer use has become commonplace for more than 70% of government employees, fewer than 2% of these PC's are linked to the internet, and serve mainly the purposes of word processing.

According to the results of surveys conducted by independent agencies such as Public Opinion Fund, ROSTIT, Comkon, and others, more than 3 million Russians (2% of the population) use the Internet regularly. From 1999-2000, Internet access increased by three times its previous rate of usage, announcing the formation of modern telecommunication infrastructure. The Ministry for Telecommunications reports that in Russia there are 32 million phone lines, or 21.3 lines per 100 people. This indicates that current levels trail those of developed countries by slightly less than 2 times that figure. The lack of traditional telephone lines, however, will become less of a barrier to Internet access as wireless telecommunications joint forces to make web access easier.

Presently, however, distribution of Internet users is significantly skewed toward large Russian cities: Novosibirsk leads with 34.1% PCs connected to the Internet, while the figures for Moscow and St. Petersburg are 33.2 and 32.8% respectively.

The high cost of service providers, due in large part to tight control and regulation of the telecommunications industry, remains the main barrier to widespread Internet usage and access.

As an example, to reach their subscribers, online service providers often have no choice but to purchase local exchange services from monopoly- or government- owned telephone companies. The prices for these services are thus subject to significant inflation, reflected in the high costs of data services for the customers. Thus, MGTS in Moscow makes it virtually impossible for independent Internet service providers (ISP) to buy telephone lines to provide services. Subsequently, the ISP owned by MGTS (MTU-Intel) has expanded to 1300 lines in 2 years, becoming the largest ISP in Moscow. This tendency is even more prevalent at the local levels, where there is virtually no opportunity for independent ISPs to conduct their own price policy.

The statistics suggest, however, that even widespread availability of the Internet would not sustain electronic methods of access to government information. Those Russians with Internet access rarely go to the net for government information. Independent polls reveal that 27% of citizens spend their time online searching for free software; 22.7% mention computer games; and 22.5% - entertainment. No respondents mention government information. These figures reflect the unsubstantial quality and quantity of available information, rather than lack of demand for pertinent government information.

In comparison, in Canada 75% of participants in similar polls had visited a government website and 19% had sent an email to a government official. Furthermore, others would likely do so: some 82% thought that their use of the Internet would have high or moderate impact in

influencing government decisions, and 62% believe the government website would be a useful mean to register their views on government matters.

Administrative barrier. Too often governments treat official information as their property, rather than something to hold and maintain on behalf of the people. There are as of yet no laws and regulations obliging government officials to provide open access to information of public interest. As a result, the responsibility to upload the daily information on their activities is not included in the job descriptions of government employees.

Policy Framework. However, the problem is more significant than just obliging civil servants to post government information regularly, as it reflects a general lack of a coherent and user-friendly information policy.

Primarily, Russian politicians and public administrators at all levels still do not consider government as an arm of public service. Instead, it is run as an agency for ruling, controlling, regulating, and permitting, or not permitting, activities of its citizens. Limited access to government services and information is a logical consequence of a system focused mainly on regulatory functions.

Secondly, more proactive policy and efforts are needed to push forward the development of E-technology in Russia. In February 2001 the Russian Government recognized the necessity of having a national policy on E-development. Three ministries, Ministry for Economic Development and Trade, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Telecommunications, together with the Higher School for Economics and Bureau for Economic Analysis, were assigned to develop the Program entitled *Electronic Russia*. In May 2001 it was submitted to the Russian Government for review and approval.

The Program sets the following objectives to be achieved within the period from 2002 to 2010:

- ✍ To create e-government in Russia;
- ✍ To promote new information technologies into the Russian markets (deregulation strategy to reduce administrative barriers);
- ✍ To develop infrastructure for promotion of new information and telecommunication technologies; and
- ✍ To promote education reform on IT.

In regards to the section on the creation of e-government, the Program has the following specific objectives:

- ✍ To transform the documentation flow within the government agencies of all levels into the electronic format;
- ✍ To establish an electronic interface between the government agencies and businesses,
- ✍ To ensure, through the Internet, public access to all the government information.
- ✍ To create a telecommunication and information environment favorable to the development of E-government.

The program also involves creation of a governmental portal.

The total amount of funds allocated for the 9-year program was set at \$2.5. The funds are comprised of federal budget funds (50%), regional budgets funds (29%), and investments.

Interesting comparisons can be made between these proposals and similar initiatives of other governments. The *Government On-Line* effort by the Canadian Government aims to provide all government services and information via the Internet by 2004. Of the 57 services that the Federal Government could provide on-line, 48 are already delivered to some degree over the Internet.

In Singapore, a five-point plan for *eGovernment* was released in June 2000. The government has committed \$1.5 billion to ensure the program objectives are realized.

The Norwegian Government has a stated objective to increase the extent to which citizens and businesses can deal with government online, outlined in 1999 in its policy on *Electronic Government*. This policy formed the basis of the *Easier Norway* initiative, now renamed *eNorway*. This is a two-year initiative to simplify access to government information and services online.

In 2000, the Spanish Central Administration launched *Info XXI*. This ambitious US \$4.2 billion program is partially dependent upon private sector funding. Already, 62 out of 115 services that the Central Government is responsible to deliver have been provided some degree over the Internet.

This comparison shows that although the funding allocated for *Electronic Russia* is similar to funds allocated for similar programs throughout the world, the program objectives are expected to be achieved in a much longer term – in 9 years as compared to 2-3 years for other countries. Additionally, the details of the program remain vague, and as yet it resembles a declaration rather than an action plan.

The program *Electronic Russia* presupposes simultaneous efforts of federal, regional and municipal agencies. The federal government takes over the overall management of the program, legislative initiatives and educational standards. E-government models are structured for primary piloting and introduction at the municipal level, where the majority of vital government services are provided to citizens, and where it is possible to gather the grass-root information serving as the foundation for data bases at all levels.

Thus, those local administrations planning to apply for a pilot e-government project must necessarily reinvent traditional information policy. The focuses range from changes in departmental structure and interfaces of each department with citizens, to formulation of a 'new language' in communications with citizens, to additional efforts to smooth the digital inequality, and to the increasing role of citizen groups in contacting and questioning governments.

Findings and Conclusions

✍ Russia is still in the process of transforming freedom of information rights, along with other constitutional rights, from a mere declaration and promise into a legally enforced act. In the

absence of supporting laws, such as that on The Right to Information, the basic policies regulating the processes of gathering and providing information remain within The Federal Law on Information and Information Protection of 1995. This law declares that state-owned information resources remain open and accessible.

- ✍ The Concept on the State Policy on the Development of Self-government in Russia of 1999 for the first time set forth the goal of creating an effective system of interaction between local governments and residents.
- ✍ In the absence of a federal law on information rights, some regions have recently initiated the development and discussion of draft regional laws on such rights. The overwhelming grass-roots response to stalled legislation at the Federal level suggests the absence of this Federal law will not continue to be a fundamental barrier to effective information exchange between governments and citizens.
- ✍ The fast development of ICTs and their growing use in public administration during the last several years has significantly quickened the pace of transparency reform of the administrative processes of government bodies. Additionally, a stronger civil society has forced bureaucrats to respond to the needs of citizens in more targeted ways. Speaking cautiously, it appears that there has been a responsive shift in the political will in the highest ranks of the Federal government toward providing open information policies.
- ✍ Official information of the federal level has been distributed through traditional media, such as press releases and press conferences. The level of *consultation* type interactions between the Federal Government and local citizens is low.
- ✍ Local governments have much greater demand for local citizen participation in their programs. Local communities are also more motivated to receive adequate information from their local governments, as this information directly affects their lives. Despite mutual interest in such partnerships, there are still few channels available for comprehensive information exchange between local governments and citizens. Only a few local governments have begun to provide open access to official information through the Internet.
- ✍ It is found that, in terms of *consultations* and *participation*, citizen initiatives in discussing, contacting, and lobbying their governments have proved to be much more advanced and innovative than those of local governments.
- ✍ Internet access to government information is still limited and expensive, as a result of a monopoly-ridden telecommunication industry. Without ready access for the public to the Internet, the growth and potential benefits of E-government are also limited.
- ✍ There are no regulations obliging government officials to provide a direct access to information of public interest, either via the Internet or through other venues. As a result, the responsibility to upload the updated information is not included under the job descriptions of government employees.
- ✍ A coherent and user-friendly information policy is still lacking throughout the government and municipal administrations in Russia. More proactive policy and efforts are needed to push forward the development of e-technologies in Russia. An ambitious program, entitled *Electronic Russia*, was developed recently, and might soon be approved. The program for 2002-2010 sets a standard for the creation of e-government in Russia.
- ✍ The program *Electronic Russia* presupposes simultaneous efforts of federal, regional and municipal agencies. E-government models are structured for pilot introduction at the municipal level.

- ✎ Local administrations that are planning a pilot e-government project face the challenge of reinventing traditional information policy. The focuses range from changes in departmental structure and interfaces of each department with citizens, to formulation of a 'new language' in communications with citizens, to additional efforts to smooth the digital inequality, and to the increasing role of citizen groups in contacting and questioning governments.