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Russia Adopts New Strategy for Development of Information Society

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By: Sergey Sukhankin (<https://jamestown.org/analyst/sergey-sukhankin/>)

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Following the adoption of a new Information Security Doctrine, in December 2016 (see EDM (<https://jamestown.org/program/russias-new-information-security-doctrine-fencing-russia-outside-world/>), December 16, 2016), Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently approved a new Strategy for the Development of an Information Society for 2017–2030 (Pravo.gov.ru <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201705100002?index=0&rangeSize=1>), May 10). This document replaces the previous version from 2008. The Russian government must present a concrete roadmap by October 1, 2017, for realizing the Strategy's goals.

The May 2017 information society development strategy document is the culmination of intensive work by various governmental structures (directly controlled by the Kremlin), over the course of 2016. Contributing to this effort were Igor Shchyogolev's working group ("Internet + Economics"), numerous consultative meetings between President Putin and representatives of the Russian information technology (IT) sector, as well as the so-called "Digital Economy of the Russian Federation" initiative. The latter was promoted by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev for the needs of the Eurasian Economic Union (<http://protivkart.org/main/10382-proekt-programmy-cifrovaya-ekonomika-rf-napravlen-na-soglasovanie-v-vedomstva.html>), May 11).



(Source: RT)

The newly approved Strategy prioritizes the following areas, deemed essential for the successful development of Russian information and communications technologies:

- a new generation of electronic networks;
- the effective processing of large volumes of electronic data;
- artificial intelligence;
- electronic identification/authentication (with special emphasis on banking);
- cloud computing;
- a post-industrial Internet;
- robotics and bio-technologies; and
- information security.

Some of these elements appeared in last year's Information Security Doctrine. But this document has systematized those previously identified components, while adding some new aspects as well.

The information society development strategy states that “in 2016, the overall number of active users of the Internet in Russia reached 80 million people.” At the same time, the document acknowledges Russian vulnerabilities to external challenges in the cyber and information spheres. Namely, it points to the “existing gap” between leading global players and Russia in the domain of IT. To overcome this limitation, the newly approved Strategy calls for the following measures to be implemented between 2017 and 2030 (TASS (<http://tass.ru/obschestvo/4240969>), May 10):

1. The proliferation of Russian encryption mechanisms and enhancement of coordination in communication between various federal agencies;
2. The replacement of foreign IT equipment, software and electronic components with domestically produced analogues;
3. The protection of domestic “critical information infrastructure” (the term tends to appear in government planning documents much more frequently now than ever before) is to be secured with Russian applications and telecommunications software; and
4. An upgrade to the effectiveness of domestic communications networks, leading toward the creation of a “centralized system of monitoring and management of the Russian electronic grid” and the improvement of mechanisms of legislative regulation of mass media activities.

Most areas outlined in the document are not simply technical innovations and/or legislative proposals. Incidentally, the Strategy devotes an extremely important role to ideological concerns, including:

1. The prioritization of Russian “traditional spiritual and cultural values”;
2. The necessity to “create conditions for the popularization of Russian culture and science abroad” as well as confronting the “distortion and falsification of historical facts”; and
3. The proliferation of “steady cultural and educational contacts with Russian compatriots [*sootechestvenniki*] living abroad, foreign citizens, [as well as] persons without citizenship” who are, however, “Russian native speakers” through employment of “communicational and information technologies.”

Another essential task outlined in the document is to create a basis for a national electronic library that would include “objects of historical, scientific and cultural heritage of nations populating the Russian Federation.” Undoubtedly, this aspect (as well as the three aforementioned points) is directly related to the so-called “Russian World” (“*Russkiy Mir*”) concept that aims to propagate Russian “soft power” abroad.

The document is extremely ambitious; yet, there are doubts about the government's ability to meet its goals. The Strategy recently approved by the president is quite vague on expected results, as reflected by the conspicuous absence of key performance indicators (KPI)—an element that was clearly articulated in the previous document. Moreover, Russia in fact failed to fulfil the previous (2008–2015) Strategy. For instance, among other aspects, the antecedent document called for the Russian Federation to become one of the world's top 20 countries in terms of the development of its information and cyber technology sectors. However, various international rankings, including the E-government Development Rank, the ICT Development Index, and the Networked Readiness Index, have placed Russia somewhere between 35th and 45th place. So despite allocating significant government resources to this end, that strategic goal was not achieved. Moreover, a key objective established in the previous Strategy was for the overall share of Russian IT goods and services used domestically to exceed 50 percent by 2015—this also remained unfulfilled. In fact, according to Russian sources, the domestic share of IT goods and services “satisfied internal market demand only by a quarter” ([TASS \(http://tass.ru/politika/3869202\)](http://tass.ru/politika/3869202), December 14, 2016). Finally, the new Strategy provides no roadmap for how Russia's IT sector is going to attract additional external investments given Western economic sanctions and the lack of crediting possibilities for Russian companies.

Similarly, the new document seems to be obfuscating the actual effectiveness and efficiency of the government's financial injections into Russian IT projects. An illustrative case is the Russian Internet search engine “Sputnik,” launched in May 2014 by state-owned Rostelecom, which became nothing more than a sound embarrassment and a financial black hole. Initially allocated an estimated \$20 billion in financing (the Russian side refrained from disclosing the actual sum) it was supposed to become a competitor to Google and other known Internet search engines. However, after three years of obscurity, it has been practically shut down as an “uncompetitive project” ([Meduza \(https://meduza.io/news/2017/05/12/gosudarstvennomu-poiskoviku-sputnik-grozit-zakrytie-na-ego-sozdanie-potratili-20-millionov-dollarov\)](https://meduza.io/news/2017/05/12/gosudarstvennomu-poiskoviku-sputnik-grozit-zakrytie-na-ego-sozdanie-potratili-20-millionov-dollarov), May 12).

This being said, it would be worthwhile to add yet another point of concern. It bears noting that Moscow is currently tightening its grip over the domestic Internet space (the so-called “Runet”) and mass media (see [EDM \(https://jamestown.org/program/russias-new-information-security-doctrine-fencing-russia-outside-world/\)](https://jamestown.org/program/russias-new-information-security-doctrine-fencing-russia-outside-world/), December 16, 2016; see [Commentaries \(https://jamestown.org/russian-internet-freedom-still-threatened-despite-government-claims/\)](https://jamestown.org/russian-internet-freedom-still-threatened-despite-government-claims/), October 4, 2014). Therefore, one might wonder if the government's new Strategy is nothing more than a new brick in the wall of “information isolation” of the Russian population and a subordination of the Runet to the state's full and unconditional

control. For instance, on May 5, President Putin tasked the telecommunications supervisory agency Roskomnadzor, the Russian prosecutor general, and the All-Russia People's Front (a loose umbrella group of pro-Putin "civil society" organizations, business associations, trade unions and political parties) to prepare proposals concerning effective restrictions and controls on the Runet (Rosbalt (<http://www.rosbalt.ru/russia/2017/05/05/1613343.html>), May 5).

In the meantime, the Strategy calls for introducing concrete protective measures specifically designed to deal with "issues of anonymity" and "impunity" among web users in order to "guarantee the personal security of Internet users and confidentiality of their information" (Rosbalt (<http://www.rosbalt.ru/russia/2017/05/11/1614194.html>), May 11). Russian Internet freedom looks to be under threat.

1310 L St. NW, Suite 810
Washington DC, 20005

PHONE: 202.483.8888 (tel:202.483.8888)

FAX: 202.483.8337

E-MAIL: pubs@jamestown.org (mailto:pubs@jamestown.org)

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