

Alex Brudno – Competition between Regions is one of the Key e-Government Drivers in all Countries

e-Government has become objective reality which is being faced or is going to be faced by the citizens of almost any country in the world one way or another. That is why the experience of other countries can be particularly valuable and useful for Russia.



Under the auspices of the European Union in Russia the G2C project 'Support to e-Government in the Russian Federation' was launched. It has deployed and successfully operates the e-Government knowledge [web portal](#).

We asked Dr. Alex Brudno, a senior expert on e-Government for this project to answer a few questions.

What is e-Government 2.0? Do you think whether it will soon become a reality in Russia? Has it been implemented in the EU?

e-Government is really quite a good term, and it is now commonly used. With regard to e-Government 2.0, there are different interpretations of the concept. For example, the WWW inventor Tim Berners-Lee believes the term 'e-Government 2.0' is just jargon but most often the term implies interactivity and citizen involvement in the deployment of e-Government.

Governmental information systems (GIS), which have been developed since long ago, e-Government, e-Government 2.0 mean essentially the same thing. The evolving information resources, the cases like recalling tenders after the Internet reaction recently, represent the examples of online enquiries to which the authorities do respond.

Therefore I believe that e-Government 2.0 has been started in Russia.

The situation in the European Union is about the same but of course the EU is ahead in the number of available services. Furthermore, they have no such a significant 'digital divide' in terms of the level of e-Government development at different places.

After all, who needs e-Government more, the authorities or citizens?

Both, the authorities to a greater degree. That's why it is called e-Government.

Look at how many e-Government conferences, meetings, decrees and other activities have been initiated at the highest level in Russia in recent years.

Following the emergence of the Internet, governments of all countries can no longer apply the old governance patterns with respect to the people who are themselves working and thinking in new ways. The brilliant Barack Obama's election campaign, the events in Tunis and Egypt as well as the Manezhnaya Square, all those show that the Internet is becoming a powerful political tool. In the last century, revolution/anti-revolution forces used to seize 'the telegraph and the railway stations', and now the key point is the Internet!

People today can choose where to live and work. They choose the most comfortable state, and the standard of e-Government development - which should mitigate bureaucracy and corruption - is highly important, perhaps it goes second after work and the level of taxation.

Your portal is active in delivering e-Government knowledge fundamentals. Are you satisfied with the outcomes, and what are your plans to expand?

We are very satisfied. Our [G2C project](#) is executed by the [GDSI](#) and is funded by the EU. We held e-Government seminars in Petrozavodsk, Astrakhan, Vologda, Ulyanovsk, Kaluga, Khanty-Mansiysk and Tambov. They were attended by over 600 people. The regions of Vologda, Kaliningrad, Ulyanovsk as well as the Republic of Karelia are our pilot areas where some particular issues are being addressed. In addition, the project portal provides free [online training](#) in e-Government basic principles. More than 1,500 people from 99 cities of Russia have already received an official certificate of the course 'Introduction to e-Government'. The leaders are the Ulyanovsk region largely due to the vice Governor S.V. Openysheva and the Volgograd region. For example, the course in Barash town was taken by 95 people, Terenga (50), Inza (43), Cherdakly (32) etc. (details of the [2010 online training outcomes](#)). Such coverage can be obtained only with distance learning. More than 91% of the trainees believe the course is useful. For many of them it was the first online training experience of that kind. In the near future the project intends to expand the range of training courses.

Despite the best efforts of the authorities, e-Government in Russia is not developing as fast as one would like it to be. In your opinion, what causes more problems, technologies, regulatory framework or mentality?

The Internet is the greatest change in the work method of authorities since the invention of printing in the XV century. You could even say that it surpasses the typography by the magnitude and revolutionary nature of the changes. Countries and regions unprepared for this revolution will lose its citizens, business and power.

e-Government cannot be introduced by a decree but it requires meticulous work, time and patience. But some significant interim results need to be achieved too. We conducted a survey showing that 70% of our users had found successful the launch and operation of the portal [Gosuslugi.ru](#). Another thing, the cost of the portal - the cost of such major activities would be high in all countries – and monopolisation of e-Government in Russia is absolutely unacceptable.

Of course, all of the major problems lie in the legal area. The e-Government challenges in terms of the information scope and processing requirements are relatively low against the backdrop of modern technology advances. In the world of finance and industry, all this has long been deployed.

Mentality is personal. Moses of course led his people for 40 years until everyone born in slavery died. But what was the blame of the children who were already born during the Exodus and continued to live in the desert? Those who do not change their mentality loose.

Is there anything for Russia to learn from Western countries in order to implement e-Government, or do we have 'our own way' as usual? We still have our specificity, e.g. the large territory, low population density; to what extent does it make a difference?

You're right, it does matter. Everyone understands the conditionality of the [UN e-Government Surveys](#). But these are now the rules of the world. One may not accept it and, like in America, call football quite a different game ranking 59th in soccer in the world.

There is always something to learn. The key role in the e-Government of America - a country close to Russia in terms of a large area, density, heterogeneity of the population - is played by the states / regions. But they have their funding, the local taxes. In all countries, competition among regions is one of the most important springs of e-Government. I participated in three regional e-Government conferences in Russia, and they were all very helpful.

At the federal level, Russia is now going to launch a very important project, a multi-purpose card of a citizen of Russia. If successful, the outcome for the country will be enormous, i.e. complete numbering and registration of the population. This is the fundamental of all the G2C problems.

Given the experience of other countries, we can recommend to cover all citizens with this card including children since birth. The U.S., the country with the lowest bureaucracy, has no passports or multi-purpose card. All the citizens have a SSN (Social Security Number) number. It is on a simple piece of paper, no one is required to show it (there is no photo). No certificates need to be presented, all the information about a person is 'tied' to that number.

[Based on the survey conducted by our project](#), 22% of the Russians argue against numbering, i.e. 'counting'. But most developed countries demonstrate similar findings.

When theoretically citizens should be taught in the basics of e-Government, at the university, school, kindergarten?

I do not think that children will have problems. They all learn in the social networks.

The project is implementing the [online admission to kindergarten](#) in Karelia. All social services for children will soon be online-based. But parents do not know how to do it or are busy...

Is there any potential for Public-Private Partnership in implementing e-Government in Russia, and how to implement this potential correctly?

In my opinion, it is only this pattern which has a chance. Without competition, everything will be brought to naught or will be lagging behind at best.

One should learn to earn out of services and introduce new paid services. Neither service portal can operate effectively for a long time unless profitable.

Not only citizens but the officials themselves need to be trained in the e-Government basics. What strategy and what model might be most preferable here?

Officials are citizens too. The division of e-Government into G2C, G2B and G2G is very conditional because these components are inter-related and are developed in parallel.

Officials need to be trained in those dedicated systems which they use in the course of their activities. More than 450 officials of the Kaliningrad region have been trained in a specific electronic document management system (EDMS, a part of G2G). Employees of the Gurievsk MFC are trained to work with the [online and SMS inquiries](#) on the status of applications (this is G2C and G2B). High-level officials have to be trained in the basics of Project Management as the clients who order e-Government systems. Some respective courses are being prepared on the project portal.

What is the popularity and geographic coverage of the portal?

The portal content is very specific. We now have about 2,000 unique visits per month. Our users live in 60 countries and more than 100 cities in Russia. The site has a detailed [report](#) on using the portal, training system and survey results.

Thank you. Now my last question. Why your portal is called "e-Kolokol (e-Bell in English)"?

When I was looking for a short name for the portal, the key words: Russia, information dissemination, community development, European experience reminded me of Alexander Herzen (Russian publisher of famous "Kolokol " journal in London) right away. e-Government is a very important area of social development which should be remembered all the time.

G2C portal: Russian access map

