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Analysis of the "2017-2030 Strategy for the Development of an Information Society in the Russian Federation"

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On 9 May 2017, Vladimir Putin signed an Executive Order on the "2017-2030 Strategy for the Development of an Information Society in the Russian Federation." The Strategy's principal goal mentioned in the document is "to create conditions for the formation of a knowledge society in the Russian Federation." It can be inferred that Russia is preparing for a total information warfare with the world, which is supposed to take many years, and the defensive aspect of this warfare will be its crucial role.

Context of the document

The Strategy was drafted already last year by the Presidential Directorate for Application of Information Technology and for Development of E-Democracy, headed by Igor Shchyogolev, the President's assistant and former Minister of Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation. The works on the document were performed also by representatives of other government agencies, the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, and experts. The document was published on the website of the Security Council of the Russian Federation on 13 December 2016 in order to hold a public debate on the draft of the new Strategy, which ended on 25 December 2016.

The document superseded the previous Strategy for the Development of the Information Society in the RF in force since 7 February 2008, which was also approved by President Vladimir Putin at the end of his second term of office. The new Strategy largely differs from the previous one and despite the wording "development of an information society" in the document's title, it refers to the social development as understood by the Western world to a small extent. Its provisions remind, or even repeat in certain places, the new Russian Information Security Doctrine of 5 December 2016 than the previous Strategy for the Development of the Information Society. This arises probably from the fact the **works on the new Strategy were performed in parallel to the works on the new Information Security Doctrine**, which was approved by the Russian President less than two weeks before the Strategy draft was published.

Apart from that, a considerable portion of the Strategy is dedicated to the issue of digital economy, which is an object of works under a different digital economy development programme, which was handled by the Ministry of Communications and Mass Media of the RF until recently. **The effect of the Ministry's works is a draft programme "Digital Economy of the Russian Federation"**, which was referred for approval by the Russian government last week. The preparation of the programme was commissioned by Vladimir Putin in his December address to the Federal Assembly. As a result, the new **Strategy for the Development of the Information Society in the RF seems to be a compilation of the Information Security Doctrine and the Digital Economy development programme** with few elements of the old Strategy, which became out-dated along with the change in the geopolitical situation in the world and increased risk to the national interests and security of the Russian information space as defined by Russia.

New Strategy

The new Strategy stresses the development of the information society defined in the document as "the society where the information and its utilisation level and availability fundamentally influence the economic and sociocultural conditions of the citizens' lives"; the formation of the national digital economy; the protection of national interests and the execution of the strategic national priorities of Russia.

The new Strategy's priorities, in turn, include:

- ensuring citizens' right to access information;
- ensuring freedom of choosing the sources of knowledge when working with information;
- protecting the traditional forms of obtaining goods and services and (other than digital) that are accepted by citizens;
- prioritising traditional Russian spiritual values and moral standards and complying with the rules of conduct based on these values with the use of information and communication technologies;
- ensuring lawfulness and reasonable necessity when collecting, gathering and sharing information about citizens and organisations;
- ensuring state protection of the Russian citizens' interests in the sphere of information.

The initial **assurance about the development of the society and granting of rights and freedoms in the area of obtaining and accessing information by Russian citizens are in conflict with Russia's national interests and issues regarding security of the Russian information space** arising from other strategic documents and doctrines, in particular the Russian Information Security Doctrine of December. It turns out that the entire Strategy is supervisory in nature and restricts the freedom of choice and access to information sources. The restrictions occur already at the stage of definition of certain terms included in the Strategy. And so, the "knowledge society" mentioned as the primary goal pursued by the Strategy is defined as: "the society where obtaining, storing, generating and disseminating true information with strategic national priorities of the Russian Federation taken into consideration are decisive for the development of the citizen, the economy and the state."

On the one hand, the document points to the dangers and threats posed by the development of information and communication technologies to "the critical information infrastructure" of Russia in the form of foreign technologies used in its territory: "the common application of foreign information and communication technologies, including in critical information infrastructure facilities, hampers the accomplishment of the tasks related to ensuring protection of the citizens' and state's interests in the information sphere." Primarily, to cyber-attacks on the governmental and private information resources and the critical Russian information infrastructure. On the other hand, it indicates the negative influence of the Internet on social skills of receiving information, describing them as mass and superficial. The document implies that such a form of acquiring information facilitates the possibilities to impose certain social behaviour models above all "by the states and organisations being in possession of information dissemination technologies."

In order to avoid the threats of using foreign technologies and of infiltration of outside information into the Russian society, the document proposes solutions aiming at:

- shaping the information space with the citizens and society's needs related to acquisition of valuable and reliable information into account;
- developing the Russian information and communication infrastructure;
- creating and using Russian information and communication technologies and ensuring their competitiveness at the international level;
- forming a new technological base for the development of the economic and social spheres;
- protecting the state's interests in the area of digital economy.

Although extensive, the document itself can be reduced to two aspects, namely: **expansion of the state's supervision over the Internet in Russia (in the political dimension) and replacement of foreign information and communication technologies with the Russian ones (in the commercial dimension)**. At the same time, both aspects are connected with the implementation of the **concept of digital sovereignty consisting in the state's supervision over information dissemination in its territory and independence from external influences**, and they need to be considered also in the dimension of Russia's national security.

The Russian information space is to be shaped i.a. through popularisation of the Russian language in the world; support for traditional, that is other than online, forms of knowledge dissemination; organisation of events supporting the Russian culture, science, moral standards and spiritual values, and the Russian national identity. For the same purpose, the Russian state grants itself the right to "improve the mechanisms of restricting access to the information dissemination of which is forbidden in the RF under federal laws and to remove it."

The Strategy exposes also another point proving the supervisory nature of the document: mechanisms regulating the activity of the media and other information access methods which, according to the Russian legislators, are not media, namely: online television, news aggregators, social networks, websites, and online messengers. This means that **the Russian state reserves the right to restrict access not only to the media but also, in broader terms, to information through all digital forms available in the Russian society**.

In order to balance the effect of information access regulation, it is proposed to take measures to ensure "dissemination of reliable and valuable information of the Russian origin." Thus, there is the **double mechanism intending to indoctrinate the country's own society** by, firstly, limiting alternative information, and secondly, imposing its own narration.

Stressing and supporting the traditional forms of information dissemination, such as the radio, television, or printed press, is also in conflict with global trends. Additionally, it turns out that the Russian information space, with all its restrictions in information access and control imposed on its own society, is at the same time expansive in nature and is not limited to the RF.

This is how the Russian state once again uses **its official strategic documents to legitimise the possibility to interfere with the internal politics of other countries in through standing up for its own traditional spiritual values and moral standards and Russian-speaking persons**. It needs to be noted that, apart from Russian citizens residing abroad, the Strategy mentions citizens of other countries and stateless persons who can communicate in Russian.

Further, the Strategy focuses on developing the information and communication infrastructure of the RF the aim of which is "to protect the citizens' and organisations', RF government and local government authorities' free access to information at all stages of its generation and dissemination." What draws particular attention is the endeavour to centralise the regulations with this respect, which is manifested in "creating central monitoring and management of the Russian information infrastructure operation at the level of information systems and data processing centres, as well as at the level of communications networks." The Russian aspirations to replace foreign technologies and software in information and communication systems with ones produced in Russia, both at the national level in order to ensure independence from foreign production and information security and at the social level, seem equally important.

What is noteworthy in the social context is the provision on "creating integrated mechanisms for information protection to be used in Russian information and communication technologies," which could imply that the Russian state ensures itself the possibility to continuously monitor and supervise the Russian society in the area of information access. The Russian tendencies to control its own information space are confirmed by another provision, where Russia reserves the right to define the information, technological and economic policies "in the state (author's note: Russian) segment of the Internet" at the same time granting itself the right to "perform works counteracting the use of the Internet for war purposes." This means that the new document was prepared entirely with a view to wage information warfare, both from the defensive and offensive positions.

The part dedicated to the commercial use of Russian information and communication technologies refers mainly to the creation of new markets and ensuring Russia the leader's position in this area both on the domestic market and on foreign markets. This means **ensuring export of the Russian scientific and engineering thought and results in the form of Russian technologies to the international market with the simultaneous**

regulation of access to foreign technologies to the Russian market. Here the Strategy proceeds to create conditions for developing the digital economy. The principles of operation between the state, entrepreneurs and citizens in the economic area are mentioned in a general manner. These principles were elaborated in a separate programme "Digital Economy of the Russian Federation," the draft of which was referred to the government by the Ministry of Communications and Mass Media of the RF.

However, it is worth stressing that the new Strategy puts a considerable emphasis on the regulation of access to the Russian market and the Russian information space for foreign technologies and entities. It stipulates i.a.: "the compliance with the Russian laws by foreign market participants on equal terms with Russian organisations." This means application of the anti-trust law towards entities "providing the software, goods and services that are available via the Internet to persons staying in Russia", and production of laws that protect personal data of Russian citizens and access to them in the RF. This is particularly significant from the viewpoint of the operation of international enterprises from the Internet industry, whose goods and services require users to give consent to personal data processing. This concerns above all foreign email services, social networks and online messengers.

In order to execute the new Strategy for the Development of an Information Society, the President of Russia obliged the government to prepare its implementation plan within 6 months and adapt other strategic planning documents to the Strategy's provisions.

Conclusions

The new Strategy for the Development of an Information Society in the RF is Russia's obvious response to the changing political and security situation in the world. It is also a confirmation that Russia is waging information warfare in its own territory, also towards foreign entities in and outside the country. Although it was published almost two weeks ago, Western countries or media have not reacted to it so far. And yet the **analysis of the Strategy's content shows that it is currently one of the most significant, or even the most significant, strategic document of the RF in the area of security**.

Apart from the detailed content, this can be evidenced also by the form, as it was confined to 29 pages, to circa 45 thousand characters. For the sake of comparison, the volume of the previous Strategy was circa 17 thousand characters and the new Information Security Doctrine of the RF was confined to 17 pages. In comparison to the old strategy in force in the period 2008-2015, the validity term of the new document was expanded considerably – it was almost doubled. This certifies Russia's long-term policy in the area in question.

It indicates not only certain tendencies of Russia to violate its citizens' rights and restrict their free access to information. It is in fact a **strategic document embodying the concept of Russia's digital sovereignty, which – for the first time – officially discloses the RF's aspirations to control information dissemination in its territory and become independent of external influences**. In the practical dimension, this means strengthening

Russia's position in the area of information and communication technology, i.e. **striving for a total state control over the Internet** in that country and restricting access to the Russian market for foreign entities and services from the information, including media, sector to the Russian market by replacing foreign information and communication technologies with domestic ones.

It can be inferred that Russia is preparing for total information warfare with the world, supposed to take many years, and the defensive aspect of this warfare will be its crucial role. If it is decided that a threat to Russian national interests and security, including information space, has occurred, **the RF has equipped itself with tools enabling a total separation of the Russian society from the information, disseminated via digital media, which is undesirable by the state authorities and replacement with its own narration in the country's information space**.

In its new Strategy, Russia unambiguously states that it performs "works counteracting the use of Internet for war purposes" at the international level. Russia's controlling and restricting its own citizens' rights and freedoms should be a sufficient proof for Poland and other countries of the Western world that **Russia is not going to comply with the fundamental principles of democracy and, more importantly, it represents a confrontational attitude towards Western values and rules of the social and political life**. By presenting the new Strategy for the Development of an Information Society, Russia has officially announced its advanced stage of preparation for information warfare with the Western world.

At the same time, when pointing to the threats to Russian national interests and security of its own information space, the RF disclosed the method which it could apply in its operations as part of the information warfare with other countries. They will consist mainly in **influencing the information space and, what follows, the societies of other countries and imposing its own narration with reference to the global situation**. It will do so via information and communication technologies by both interfering with foreign goods and services and using its own which could be exported to foreign markets. However, Russia sees that the crucial role in the information warfare is played by all forms of information dissemination, i.e. not only in the traditional media but also via online TV, news aggregators, social networks, websites, and online messengers.