

**of the ACEEEO Executive Board,
Chairman of the CEC of Russia,
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Speech of Chairman

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Automated Systems in the Election Process

Dear conference participants, colleagues!

First of all I must say that we were happy to accept an invitation to make a presentation on an important and actual for election officials of many countries topic of automation of the election process.

The Russian electoral system is still very young – we celebrated its 10th anniversary a month ago. But from the very beginning a large-scale utilization of information technologies was an integral part of activities of the system of election commissions of the Russian Federation. During this time we have formed a clear and specific vision of the role and place of automation in election processes and the directions in which informatization in this area should develop. We would like to take advantage of this opportunity to share this experience with you.

All elections in the Russian Federation of the federal and regional levels (including the municipal ones) are conducted using the common State Automated System “Vybory”. Its logical architecture fully corresponds with the hierarchical interrelations of the system of election commissions headed by the Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation and amalgamates – in the informational sense – the work of all election commissions.

Yet in early 90's the CEC of Russia was facing the main problem of what kind of a system we wanted to build: would it automate certain elements of the election process (such as the vote count and results determination) or the entire election system of the Russian Federation. In other words, we were facing the choice of whether to build "a very large calculator" or to develop a new type of system solutions integrating automation in the sphere of relations that emerge in the course of the election process.

We chose the second path that resulted in the development of original system solutions of the State Automated System "Vybory". While doing that we studied experiences of a number of countries in which information technologies are actively used in elections. At the same time I would like to stress that the system was created without any borrowings from foreign analogues.

The system was created to achieve the following goals:

First, to reduce the labor output ratio and information processing terms when conducting elections and referenda;

Second, to increase the reliability of election results data, protect them from possible distortion, and simplify the public control;

And third, to enhance the trust of the society with respect to the election system.

It was this approach that determined the most important qualities and distinctive features of the GAS "Vybory".

It can be said that the uniqueness of the GAS "Vybory" is in that it lay the groundwork for the development of a new class of Russian information systems – that of socially-oriented ones. It automates the process of democratic formation of state's power structures and in that sense its users are not ministries or enterprises but all the citizens, the society, and the country upon the whole.

Thus, the functioning of the GAS “Vybory” is not confined to the solution of technical problems of data transfer and processing. The foundation of the system is the normative base of elections which is constantly being improved and in certain regions and municipalities can be essentially different. The problem of translating norms of humanitarian and legal nature (the election law) into a set of formalized processes that can be automated has been solved at the system level.

That is why one may state that the GAS “Vybory” really provides for the implementation of the election rights of citizens in compliance with the Constitution and legislation of the Russian Federation, as well as international election standards.

Another important quality of the system is its adaptability. Taking into account the permanent improvement of the legislative base of elections in the country and its regions the system was blueprinted and built as an adaptive and multi-tasking one that is capable of catering simultaneously to elections of different kinds based on normative acts of different levels. The system supports all types of election processes and most importantly conducts them *simultaneously*.

The GAS “Vybory” is equally reliable both as a system of the federal level and as independent regional and even municipal subsystems (fragments). The system allows simultaneously conducting all possible types and levels of election campaigns existing in the Russian Federation.

The idea of developing typical complexes automating the work of election commissions turned out to be a fruitful one. For each horizontal level of election commissions there has been developed a specific type of *homogeneous* HW & SW environment. This solution entails such qualities as adaptability, scalability, reliability, and viability which make it possible to support the national election system of the Russian Federation within the changing legal environment in an operative mode.

All of the above said allows one to make a conclusion that as of today the GAS “Vybory” has no analogies in the world.

Now to the basic functions currently fulfilled by the GAS “Vybory” for the purposes of preparation and conduct of elections as it follows from the Russian legislation.

It is, first and foremost, the permanent replenishment and development of the legal information base, planning of election campaigns and electoral actions for each campaign, and organization of financial support of election campaigns using the budget resources.

Surely, voter databases are regularly replenished and updated; parties, election blocs, and candidates are registered, deputy mandates are issued.

Accumulation and expenditure of election funds of candidates running for elective offices are monitored in the course of elections, as are rules of campaigning accounted for by the legislation.

Finally, data from precinct election commissions’ protocols are entered, preliminary and final voting results are determined, and election results are published.

Let me also say a few words about technical specifications of the GAS “Vybory”.

The system is distributed throughout the territory of Russia (and this is 11 time zones) and is to be found practically in each of the 3,000 cities and district centers. The computation facilities of the system include almost 10 thousand computers joined together in an integrated network and deliberately separated from the Internet environment.

Within a matter of four to five hours the GAS “Vybory” is capable of collecting and summarizing data from the most remote districts of the country (there are more than 94 thousand election precincts in the country). At the same

time, the system allows to simultaneously conduct elections of different levels accounting for the changing and overlapping administrative and territorial units.

A complex security infrastructure has been put into place to safeguard the transfer and storage of system data, as well as to ensure safe access to the GAS “Vybory” functions and data. Security is ensured through a complex of hardware, software, and organizational measures.

Over the past years the GAS “Vybory” has been successfully employed to facilitate the conduct of five federal, approximately 500 regional, and almost 1,500 municipal election campaigns. I would like to clarify that a typical example of an election campaign of the federal level is characterized by the following figures: the technological process lasts approximately three months and up to one million election commission members and more than 100 million voters take part in the process.

And one more important and significant for the society characteristic of the GAS “Vybory” – the data collected with utilization of system’s resources are made available to the general public on the CEC of Russia website in an on-line mode. Complete election protocols data reflecting vote results from each election precinct are made available on the website of the election commission of subject of the RF not later than within 24 hours of the completion of the voting. Thus, the GAS “Vybory” enables the general public to exercise effective control over the determination of voting results.

Dear Colleagues!

The GAS “Vybory” of the Russian Federation initially had a national status and was designed and developed as an integral part of the state institute of election commissions.

In January of this year a federal law was passed that is entirely dedicated to the GAS “Vybory”. Thus, the significance of the system was acknowledged at

the legislative level, as were its status and mode of utilization. As far as we know, there are no other laws like that in the world.

As a result, the GAS “Vybory” has officially acquired a new quality of a *state development instrument*, a guarantor of reliability, objectivity and precision of the most important state process – that of conducting elections and referenda.

The GAS “Vybory” is an open, socially and politically neutral system functioning within the domain of the public law that directly affects interests of the society and citizens. For the first time the adopted law determined the essence of a new means of public administration – it is not an organization, nor is it an institute of power, but a global specialized automated system.

This tool can be precisely and unambiguously determined and controlled which is reflected in the new federal law. At the same time one should bear in mind that the internal organization of the system is not significant for the law. It is enough to know that the system adequately replicates operations in the order accounted for by the normative documents adopted by the CEC of Russia that stem from the existing law. The system is a precise, speaking figuratively, “clockwork” mechanism the permanent operation of which is supported by the obligatory observation of these acts.

I would now like to say a few words about the development prospects of the GAS “Vybory”.

Today the automation of election processes in Russia enters a new phase of the stable progressive development on the basis of contemporary achievements of information technologies. We understand that the main goal of the improvement of the GAS “Vybory” is to make the voting process as comfortable as possible for the end-users of the system, i.e., citizens of our country. The system must serve the people who come to voting stations; it must be user-friendly and understandable for the citizens.

In this respect we consider that ensuring the compatibility of the GAS “Vybory” with any reputable data collection technology used in the process of

voting, be that ballot scanners, electronic sensing means of voting, Internet-based voting, or wireless telephone voting, is one of the most important development directions for the system. It is true however that in latter cases information security requirements must be increased, but it is understandable and we are ready to do that. What is significant here is that regardless of the method used to collect initial data (voting results) the GAS “Vybory” will provide an end-to-end support for the entire system of election commissions of the Russian Federation.

Finally, we consider the integration of digital signature technologies which in the long run will afford electronic documents created within the system a legal status to be one of the significant directions of the system’s development (and this has been accounted for by the federal law on the GAS “Vybory”).

Dear Colleagues!

I hope that this brief introduction to GAS “Vybory” has convinced you that the entire experience of the development of the Russian election system indicates that automation of election processes is in principle not confined to some “large calculator”. What is necessary is a thought-through coherent automation of the entire complex of election processes that makes it possible *to realize* norms of civilized democracy that cannot be manipulated or controlled at the contemporary level. This means – to ensure conduct of truly free, democratic, and fair elections, which is essentially the main goal of our activities as election officials.

Given that a project of pan-European legal and operational standards of electronic voting is being currently implemented within the Council of Europe and in view of the fact that our Association has a consultative status within the Council of Europe I suggest that we make our contribution to the solution of this important issue. In order to do that I suggest that a task force be put together within the ACEEEO which could summarize

experiences of our countries in the automation of election processes in order to develop open standards in this area on the basis of both the existing laws and draft legislation.

Thank you for your attention.