

		<p>Government Information and Centers of Business and Legal Information in Russia</p> <p>Emma Voskanyan Department of Official Publications Russian State Library</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Date : 07/08/2006</p>
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New Russia is based on the principals of law and freedom.

Valery Zorkin,

The Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation

Information is power. Access to the information is the condition of freedom.

Daniel Bell

ABSTRACT

Russia is among the information-richest states with information resources vast both in traditional and in new technologies. At the present time impediments have arisen through new hierarchies of ownership which disaggregate government information sources. Furthermore the limitations or even absence of access to information and communications technologies (ICT's) deprives the people of the possibility to exercise their rights in full measure. The Russian state, acknowledging the provisions of the conventions on international documents on these problems, seeks, as far as possible, to make political, socio-economic and research information public and thus to make access to the most important information easier for everybody. Access to government information and especially to that part designated as "public significant information" is of special importance. Among the institutions responsible for collecting, organizing and disseminating the information, libraries play a significant role. There are more than 150 thousand libraries, subordinated department and administrative principals in the Russian Federation (RF) and among them 51 thousand are public. Under the authority of the Ministry of Culture and Mass Communications are 9 federal libraries and 217 central libraries covering all 89 subjects of the RF; 49,700 public libraries (city and municipal) out of which 39,400 libraries are situated in rural settlements and 10,300 – in cities.

At the beginning of the 1990's Russian legal reform specialists conducted a careful study of the international scene. They came to the conclusion that the major problem is where to locate authoritative sources of official information and legal knowledge to ensure they could be open to

general use. Russian experts considered that such a source would be Russia's public libraries. The library system built during the years of Soviet power proved to be both steady and flexible and the library community was the most receptive of all to change.

The paper describes how, building on the solid base of libraries, the government reformers created specialized models of information access throughout the country which function very effectively. Centers of business information, centers of legal information and united centers of legal and business information, electronic (or virtual) centers of legal and business information and centers of public access have been created beginning in 1993, continuing to the present.

Introduction. Information and its significance for society in Russia.

Development of the information society in our country is accompanied by several peculiarities and problems as a result of the coincidence in time of the information revolution and the inherent social-political reconstruction process. With regards to information, Russia is one of the richest states and its information resources are vast both in traditional and in new technologies. State information resources of the country are formed and used in the framework of the state and branch systems such as state government bodies; bodies of scientific and technical information; statistics; systems of education and the great information resources of libraries, archives, and museums.

For Russia, with its enormous territory and not enough developed social infrastructure, the significance of new information-communication technologies (ICT) in the building of a modern information society can scarcely be exaggerated. At the same time one cannot observe significant changes to the available systems used for disseminating information. The limitation or even absence of access to ICT deprives the people of the possibility to exercise their rights in full measure. In addition, the appearance of various forms of property ownership, (other than state), such as municipal, corporate, private, joint, foreign and others, means that the possession of the information and access to it is diffused and disaggregated. Free access to and management of the full corpus of information is very difficult.

The Russian state, acknowledging the provisions of the conventions on international documents on these problems, seeks, as far as possible, to make political, socio-economic and research information public and thus to make access to key information easier for everybody. Access to government information and, especially, to the part which is designated as "public significant information" is a special priority.

At present many structures are part of the dissemination of government information in Russia but the problems of providing a unified information space in the country has not yet been overcome. The Ministry of Economic Development is at present is engaged in implementing information and communication technologies (ICT's) and is making special efforts to integrate information resources created at federal expense. The federal special purpose program "Electronic Russia. 2002-2010" - (<http://www.e-rus.ru>) is the coordinated state policy with the responsibility for using information technologies throughout the activities of the federal government bodies.

The priorities, principles and directions of the common state policy are defined in the bill entitled "Conception of using Information Technologies in the Activity of Federal Bodies up to 2010" - (<http://www.it-gov.ru>) assented to by Order 27.09.04 № 1244-r of the Government of the Russian Federation (RF). In accordance with this Conception, the Government Portal has to be a systematized entity. It is the central access point to consolidated government information and departments' services for all the Internet users. It has the following tasks:

- creating and maintaining electronic access,
- provision of information, and
- expert support to citizens and business in various types of interaction with government bodies.

Practical realization of state policy in the sphere of information and communications technologies demands the development of information legislation as a system of mutually related legal rules. At present in Russia the legislation which regulates relations in the domain of information and ICT development is growing very rapidly. The basic law “About Information, Information and Communications Technologies and Protection of Information” was adopted in 1995. The Constitution of the RF, federal laws, and the laws relating to RF citizens contain many regulations concerning information problems.

The executive order of the Government of the RF “About Providing Access to Information on the Activities of the Russian Federation Government and Federal Executive Bodies” (№ 98 of February 12, 2003) became the basic source in the domain of systematizing the documents of state government bodies and providing access to all the citizens. Many regions of Russia have accepted the normative documents on these problems and are implementing the Information Policy successfully. Among the leaders are the administration of Kchanty-Mansijsk region (http://www.neweco.ru/docs/law/hanty_mansy/18.htm), regions of Perm, Smolensk, Moscow and others.

However at present the situation analysis in the country shows that the systematization and provision of access to information is somewhat “patchy”¹ and enormous work is ahead to overcome digital inequality and to create new information resources for fulfilling the constitutional rights of citizens for information.

The creation of a full-fledged system for providing free access to government, socially significant information for the whole population of enormous Russia on the basis of modern information technologies remains a complex and wide scale task. The creation of such a system is impossible without the cooperation and partnership between the state, civil society, the private sector and international organizations. The creation of new forms of such cooperation is already in the making. Representatives of private business play an important role in defending and realizing human rights in Russia. Therefore, effective cooperation and partnership among and between private business, government and civil society underlie the creation and functioning of the centers of legal and business information. It is necessary for significant universal state systems that provide access to state information to specify and describe the information system in FAGCI (since 2003 – “Spezsvyaz of Russia”) - (<http://www.systema.ru>).

A free market of commercial systems for legal information was formed in Russia. This became one of several profitable and sufficiently stable sectors of the information market owing to the fact that legal information was one of the most significant information resources from a business point of view. This is probably the single sector where the competition and cooperation between state and commercial information services are becoming a reality. Among private companies which specialize in the creation and dissemination of data bases of the most important products of government operations – normative-legal information, absolute market leaders are “Garant” – (<http://www.garant.ru>), “Kodeks”- (<http://www.kodeks.ru>), and “Consultant Plus” – (<http://www.consultant.ru>). These companies took an active part in the creation of the centers.

Among the institutions responsible for collecting, organizing and disseminating the information, libraries play a significant role. There are more than 150 thousand libraries, subordinated department and administrative principals in the Russian Federation and among them 51 thousand are public. Under the authority of the Ministry of Culture and Mass Communications are 9 federal libraries, 217 central libraries covering all 89 subjects of the RF; 49,700 public libraries (city and municipal) out of which 39,400 libraries are situated in rural settlements and 10,300 – in cities. The resources of 150 thousand Russian libraries are the largest public traditional information source in the country. The library infrastructure permeates the entire society and is practically in all the settlements. During the past 15 years after “perestroika”, Russian libraries have been testing various innovation processes. On this base

¹ Lebedeva N.N., Fedoseeva N.N. The right of citizens for information: establishing and development// “State and Law” Journal / The Russian Academy of Sciences. The State and Law Institute.- M., 2006.-№5.-P.105.

they are creating new structures and are summoned to answer the challenges of a modern rapidly evolving social environment. Information technologies play an important role in these library activities.

At the beginning of the nineties Russian legal reform specialists carefully studied the international experience and environment. They came to the conclusion that the major problem is where to place authoritative sources of official information and legal knowledge to ensure they would be open to general use. Russian experts consider public libraries an ideal source. The library system built during the years of Soviet power proved to be both steady and flexible and the library community was the most receptive of all to change. Government thus created specialized models of information access in the country on the basis of libraries. They function very effectively. Centers of business information, centers of legal information and united centers of legal and business information, electronic (or virtual) centers of legal and business information and centers of public access have been created since 1993. Following, we examine the story of their creation, their purposes, their similarities and differences and their reaction to change.

1. Centers of business information – information for business and the business of information.

Success of the firm depends upon the information known as business intelligence or business knowledge. Business information is an essential structural element of business knowledge and makes it possible for business managers to have some knowledge about the internal and external environment. The main objective for collecting the information is the necessity to form knowledge or intelligence and make the best possible decisions with a minimum of uncertainty. The most frequent sources of business information are: government institutions, libraries, trade associations, companies which deal with scientific research and information, newspapers and magazines, business information services and on-line data bases.

From the beginning of Russian market reform a new infrastructure for supplying business began to take shape, where libraries tried to take an active part by creating special structures or centers of business information. Business centers were created with the aim of furthering the development of systems for information support for business and formed a normal business information market in Russia. They promoted development of the resources of qualitative, timely and trustworthy information for Russian business. The specialists of the centers aim to develop operative business information in the sectors of legislation, economics, management, and marketing. They manage complex information services on the questions of Russian legislation, business activity and problems of legal regulation. Officially the first center of business information based on a library appeared in 1993 at the State Public Scientific Technical Library of Russia (GPNTB of Russia). Many know this library as the organizer of the famous Crimea conferences.

The centers of business information (CBI) appeared in the first years of reform in various regions of Russia, as the saying goes, obeying the call of time. The managers' capability for innovation, for enterprise, for understanding local government powers, and last but not least, foreign colleagues' help, contributed to the creation of very specialized structures. The first centers of business information were often guided by the experience of foreign business libraries. Several libraries were fully reconstituted as specialized business libraries, but more often the centers of business information were only part of a library. Kievskaya CLS, one of the most advanced Moscow libraries, has played a great organizational and methodological role in the creation of CBI.

In 1997 the Interregional Association of Business Libraries (MADB) was founded. The main tasks of the MADB are:

- uniting the support and coordination of its members' efforts for maintaining and developing the activity of Russian libraries in the domain of business information, and

- service for the business needs of the population; establishing and strengthening the positions of libraries in the information continuum.

The MADB President is Irina Borisivna Mychnova, e-mail: madb@library.ru; <http://library.ru/1/madb>. The geography of these centers was very extensive.

The specialists of MADB outline the following conditional groups of the centers of business information:

- specialized public libraries having extensive collections on economics, law, business, which are formed mainly with the help of direct relations with central and regional publishing houses (for instance, Moscow Business Library - <http://www.mgdb.ru>);
- public libraries with various services, oriented to satisfying the comprehensive needs of businessmen concerning information, communication, education and culture;
- public libraries, which have departments where the basic activity is providing the population with business information (Information Center “Modem” Kemerovo. <http://www.kemcbs.ru>; <http://www.bibliovita.cbs.vvcom.ru>, and others);
- specialized information departments of large scientific and scientific-technical libraries (Business Information Cabinet of GPNTB - <http://www.gpntb.ru/win/gpntb/info004.html>, Conjuncture Information Cabinet of Novosibirsk GPNTB - <http://www.spsl.nsc.ru/win/h212.html>, Business Information sector of Chelyabinsk OUNB - <http://www.unilib.chel.su>, Technical Literature Section of Murmansk OUNB - <http://www.murman.ru/culture/library/>);
- children-youth libraries, which provide information support to youth-run businesses and work with foreign public funds, whose financial assistance provides access to the information of such social category as students (The Center of Business Literature and Information of the Russian State Youth Library <http://www.rgub.ru>);
- scientific-technical and trade-union libraries of large enterprises which provide business information to their specialists and the city population;
- sections of business literature, business information, book centers of university libraries (Saint-Petersburg Technical University site – http://www.ruslan.ru:8001/spb/univer/tu/tu_cdi.html, universities of Ekaterinburg, Kemerovo etc.).

Centers of business information based on libraries have their own story of development and growing and diminishing interest in them. There can be several reasons for these trends. Over the years the commercial business service infrastructure had been established and it was difficult for libraries to compete in gaining the sources of business information. In some places, it was necessary to overcome suspicions that libraries could function as commercial information centers capable of providing the quality of information needed. Nevertheless many libraries in many regions of Russia confidently found their niche. An example of successful resolution of the diverging factors is the activity of the CBI of Tula Regional Universal Scientific Library. In the first post reform years owing to the absence of competent sources of business information many libraries began to develop their own resources. The Tula Regional Universal Scientific Library adopted the model of integrated resources, having created the regional net of business information on the basis of Centers of Legal Services (CLS) of municipal libraries of the Tula region. The principles of distributed collections and accumulation of information resources in a common center was taken as the base for forming the databases of commercial information “The Producers of Goods and Services in Tula Region” (<http://tounb.tula.net/library/otdely/idc.htm>) and the net itself.

These databases have been created since 1998 and updating is completed yearly by the whole net of municipal libraries. The information input is programmed to give the possibility to maintain databases in accordance with the norms and standards accepted by the Department of Informatization of the Tula Region Administration and share the accumulated information resources. Among permanent CBI users there are the representatives of small and medium business and large-scale business of the Central region, which use information resources to find

business partners, place orders, to present new goods and so on. Other users are all-Russia firms working in the business information sphere to represent the information of the Tula region in Russian and foreign markets and also executive and legislative government structures who use the information to make management decisions and to analyze the development of various sectors of regional economics.

It is difficult to consider as satisfactory the present accessibility of state economics and business information resources at the present stage of information society development. Owing to the absence of official equal access to branch and department information, which was created by the means of tax-payers, the advantages of the information market are gained by commercial firms, attached to various state structures. These firms use the collected information resources free of charge and sell them in the market at commercial prices. (It should be said in all fairness that some of them supply the budget organization at reduced prices or free.)

In addition, independent commercial firms are very active in the market. Our experts estimate that more than 40 agencies have as their sole business the market of exchange and financial information. Financial-economic information is widely represented in the Internet and there are more than a thousand sites of complex support of business. Among them one may include the Center of Business information of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the RF (<http://www.tpprf.ru>), "Alliance-Media" (<http://www.allmedia.ru>), Information Center for Business Support (<http://www.smb-support.org>), Resource Center of Small Business (<http://www.siora.ru>), RosBusinessconsulting (<http://www.rbc.ru>) and others. All of them were created between the year 1997 and the year 2000.

After creating the infrastructure for meeting the needs of businesses, the activity of library business centers subsided. Libraries continue to take part in the distribution of the information, providing it on a non-commercial basis. The guarantee is high accessibility of libraries and the specialized library structures of centers of law and business information as well as the breadth and depth of their collections.

Many libraries create centers of business information on the basis of the collections of normative-technical documents and patents, which are always widely represented in universal scientific libraries. For instance, several regional libraries (such as Kostroma, Rostov-Don and others) work with their clients quite confidently. The resource base of the Center of Business Information of the Russian State Library is based on a collection of two million standards, official regulating and methodical materials, normal and technical terms, building, sanitary and others norms and regulations, approved by ministries and departments, instructive documents and patent materials. At the same time they adopt and fulfill regional programs of "State Support of Small Business" which is presently evolving and where libraries also take part.

In many regions there has been a very good experience of joint activity of state and local administrations, of organizations for creating the infrastructure for the support of business and for creating favorable conditions for the development of the regional information environment. The most effective activity of business centers in small municipal structure is in rural regions. As an example I would like to offer the document "The Strategy of the Social-Economic Development in the Pestyakov Region of Ivanovo Oblast." (<http://www.rustouns.com/print.php?id=003042111373>).

It goes without saying that main users and potential clients of business information centers were and still are the representatives of small business in Russia. During the years of market reform small business became a stable sector of the economics, however its potential is still not fully realized. Among the main reasons for low efficiency of small business activity in previous years is the absence of working capital and lack of the development of the mechanisms for financial and credit support. Further development and success of business information centers mainly depends upon the increase of the numbers of their users by whom they are guided – representatives of small business. The situation in Russia is now favorable and at the present time the draft law concerning small business is now under discussion. It presupposes three categories of companies: microcompanies (up to 15 persons), small companies (from 16 to 100

persons) and medium companies (from 101 to 250 persons). After the law is adopted, these companies will get guaranteed state support.

The people in our country proved to be prepared to develop a new mode of production quickly – our people, in spite of the slow economic growth and social-political crisis, still are among the most educated in the world, capable to perceive and generate new ideas and to adapt the changing technical-economic environment. Now there are about one million small enterprises in Russia, which employ 17 million people. In 2005 for the support of the small business they allotted 1,5 billion rubles. In 2006 it will be doubled to 3 billion rubles. ‘Our aim is by 2010 to achieve the share of a small business in GNP at the level of 40%, and employ 50% of working people’ to quote our Minister of Economic Development, German Gref.²

II. Public Centers of Legal Information – Russian Model of Universal Access to Public Information

Up to the present, in our country³, 1372 Public Centers of Legal Information (PCPI) have been created based on libraries. These centers collected the federal and regional legislation acts of Russia, municipal acts, standards of international law and made all of this accessible to the citizens. During the years from 2000 to 2005 alone, more than 4 million citizens addressed queries to these centers and they were given about 4.5 million references. An analysis of all the inquiries has demonstrated multiple legal problems of citizens, concerning housing and communal services, pensions, military service, rights of youth, business activity and so on. This outstanding demand for information first of all demonstrates the great need for such centers, not only for socially unprotected citizens, but also for small business and even for professional jurists. It also shows the need for further development and strengthening of the PCPI net.

The history of creating such centers began in June, 1998 in Smolensk, where the first (in Russia) Public Center of Legal Information was opened on the solid base of the universal scientific library. Providing free access to the information is the main thrust of the modernizing policy of the Ministry of Culture of Russia in the domain of library affairs. This is the main aim of reforming the whole system of informational and library services in the country. The Smolensk initiative was therefore eagerly accepted by the Russian Ministry of Culture as a good example for other libraries of the country. At the end of 1998, with the support of the Chief State Legal Administration of the President of the Russian Federation and the Legal Administration of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation of the Ministry of Culture of Russia, the Federal Agency of Government Communication and Information at the President of the Russian Federation (FAGCI) and the Russian Foundation for Legal Reform (RFLR) developed and accepted the Program, “The Creation of All-Russia Net of Public Centers of Legal Information on the Public Libraries Infrastructure”. The Program was completed in several stages.

The first stage (1998-2000)

At this stage it was planned to create 14 Public Centers of Legal Information on the basis of two national libraries – the Russian State Library in Moscow and the Russian National Library in Saint-Petersburg and 12 central universal scientific libraries in the subjects of Russian Federation (Smolensk, Bryansk, Orel, Tula, Tambov, Ryazan, Rostov-Don, Ekaterinburg, Krasnodar, Stavropol, Krasnoyarsk, Lipetsk).

The division of responsibility between the coordinators of the Program was the following:

The Ministry of Culture of Russia, using its authority and administrative and informational resources, carried out general coordination, advancing and monitoring the project, developing organizational and methodical materials and cooperation with regional organs of culture and libraries. RFLR financed the buying of the office equipment and technology for the

² Izvestiya. - 2006. – 25 may. – № 91.

³ registered at the PCLI Portal <http://www.pcli.ru>

PCPI, carried out conferences and seminars and the issuance of organizational and methodical materials and organized the publication and dissemination of actual legal materials among PCPI.

FAGCI, on a non-commercial basis, provided the legal information databases of NTC “Systema”, which contained official documents of federal, regional and municipal levels on electronic carriers, on communication channels and on interested technical specialists. Libraries carried out the necessary reorganization, allocated accommodation and provided specialists who had knowledge and skill in reference and information services.

As a result, by spring 2000 fourteen PCPI were opened and began their activity successfully. The centers at the Russian State Library and the Russian National Library also began to fulfill scientific and methodical functions for the whole net of PCPI. Managers and administrators of many disciplines of the Russian Federation took active part in the realization of the Program. They adopted appropriate methods for creating PCPI and supported them financially. During this period the coordinated activity of organs of information resources and telecommunications, FAGCI government communication centers and universal scientific libraries played a very significant role.

The Ministry of Culture of Russia and RFRL helped considerably by developing the net and supplying the centers with the technical equipment. In the years 1999-2000, the Ministry supplied 58 regional scientific and municipal libraries with the computer equipment for developing technical complexes at the Public Centers of Legal Information. Total financial expenditures amounted to about US\$ 350 000. The key element of the Program was the close coordination of the state with commercial structures, forming many different partnerships. The Ministry of Culture concluded the agreement about free or preferential information support of PCPI with leading producers of legal information systems – private companies “Consultant Plus” and “Kodeks”.

Great quantities of electronic and traditional legal publications were received from sponsors and disseminated among PCPI on charitable terms. The Ministry of Culture of Russia, the Agency for Development of Business Technologies, such publishing houses as “Legal Literature” of the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation, “Jurist” and others provided significant free support to regional libraries.

At the beginning of 2000 the idea of creating Public Centers of Legal Information was supported by the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation) which promoted the creating of scientific and methodical centers of comparative law at the Library of Foreign Literature and concentrated its efforts on the opening of centers in small towns of Russia. As a result during two years about 40 Public Centers of Legal Information were opened on a competitive basis. There was a rather wide PR-campaign for explaining the PCPI activity in federal, regional and local mass media, It promoted involving new regions, advancing the ideas of informing the citizens about legal matters. Little by little, the creating of Public Centers of Legal Information was becoming not only a necessity but a very reputable business. The experience of the first years of the Program showed that the PCPI net was of great social value, was actively demanded by the population and needed further development. It provides remarkable possibilities and it is a model of joint decision-making on socially important national tasks by state, non-state and business structures. The development of the all-Russia program favored the forming of regional programs of legal information, which stipulated the creation of the wide net of centers and subscriber terminals in state and municipal organs, libraries, scientific and educational institutions. The results achieved became possible only because of the great demand of such centers by all level of authorities and, of course, by the population.

Owing to another RFLR project – “Legal Education in Schools” – the first steps were made in joining children and youth libraries to the process of creating legal centers. And for those aims RFLR granted 150 complete sets of textbooks on legal themes to the libraries. Legal information centers for children and youth were created in Smolensk, Saint-Petersburg, Krasnodar, Nizhny Novgorod, Murmansk, Perm and many other cities of Russia.

For the professional support of Public Centers of Legal Information the necessity to attract jurists on a non-commercial basis was announced. For the first time such practices appeared in the scientific library of Smolensk region. The official opening of PCPI in the framework of the All-Russia Program called into being congenial competition between region administrations and libraries and created a kind of order of priority for being included in the second stage of the Program. They adopted and began developing their own programs for creating PCPI nets in such regions of Russia as Saha-Yakutia, Tchuvashia, Stavropol, Murmansk, Perm and Smolensk regions and some others. For instance, during the realization of the project "The legal informatization in Smolensk region" on the unite soft/hard ware basis about 200 public centers and access points of legal information were created including developing the necessary technology. In the process of creating the permanent regional Public Centers of Legal Information net the legal operating basis of the centers and their relations with their administrations were carefully developed.

In many regions as a result of PCPI activity there were additional initiatives aimed at expansion of participating citizens in lawmaking activity at local, regional and federal levels, in discussing the effectiveness of already enacted laws and in establishing the interacting between centers and legislative and executive authorities. Thus libraries began to become the forums of lawmaking discussions of citizens and public organizations, which could seriously influence the legal culture of the population.

The same situation evolved at the universal scientific library in Tula region where in the framework of PCPI the public reception office for the civil legislative initiative was created. The activity of PCPI as an intermediary between power structures and population is able to influence the growth of civic awareness and promoting inclusion of citizens in public fora. The development of the net of regional and municipal PCPI, using the unified software and hardware of FAGCI solved the problem of accessibility to local legal information and created in Russia a unified legal information space. As a result of all the efforts, by the end of 2000, instead of the planned 14 PCPI more than 200 centers had been created in the country.

The second stage (2002-2003).

In 2001-2003 the PCPI net was actively and steadily developing, being supported mainly by regional and local resources. By the end of 2001 the net had already 600 centers, at the end of 2002 there were 850, and by the middle of 2003 there were about 1200 Public Centers of Legal Information.

In 2001-2003 the Ministry of Culture of Russia took charge of the main organizational and financial problems. The Ministry of Culture of Russia supported the projects of opening Public Centers of Legal Information on the basis of central regional libraries of Tuva, Northern Osetia, Yamalo-Nenets, Amur and Ivanovo regions, and also the opening of legal and municipal information centers in the centralized library systems of Kalmykia, Karelia, Tatarstan, Tchuvashia, of the regions of Stavropol, Belgorod, Vladimir, Novgorod, Perm, and also in Novosibirsk and Penza youth libraries, in Altai, Amur, Kaliningrad, Nyzhny Novgorod, Smolensk and Sverdlovsk children libraries. The purchase and delivery of the newest legal publications for 40 regional scientific libraries was financed.

A sizable contribution towards information provision through creating Public Centers of Legal Information has been made by FAGCI, whose data basis was introduced in 56% of centers, "Consultant Plus" – 81%, "Garant" – 25% and "Kodeks" – 14% of centers. The significant information potentiality of the centers, especially at municipal libraries, was formed just by these state and commercial structures on a gratuitous basis.

In 2002 the UNESCO Russian Committee "Information for All" joined the implementation of the Public Centers of Legal Information Program, as one of the strategic directions of this flagship Program of UNESCO. It forms the policy and creates the conditions for universal access to the information which is public property.

It is important to mention that already in 2002 practically all over the country the aims and tasks of the Program were used by the local authorities as the guide to action and its

implementation passed from a regional to a municipal level. For this sake the coordinators of the Program, regional culture authorities and central scientific libraries of the Russian Federation began to conduct numerous practical conferences with the participation of the representatives of regional and municipal authorities.

The decisions of the above mentioned board of the Ministry of Culture of Russia that had facilitated union and integration of the efforts of all the participants of the program at a federal level was of major significance for the development of the Program and promoted further development of the works at regional and local levels.

The fact that about 700 centers based on municipal libraries were developed during a very short period of the newest history of Russia, speaks about the growing understanding of the extraordinary importance of legal security of citizens at the present time and about the necessity of developing Public Centers of Legal Information not only at the regional level but at a municipal level and provincial levels as well. There were 44 centers created for legal education relating to child and youth law. At the same time Public Centers of Legal Information began to appear in some central regional special libraries for blind people (12 centers).

The Program initiatives were adopted in other ministries and institutions and first of all in educational institutions of the Ministry of Education (more than 130 centers), the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice of Russia and in some other organizations. The experience of the first years of Public Centers of Legal Information activity shows that their successful development is possible only owing to the constant coordination, communication and exchange of work experience and information resources and analysis of the results. In summary, the development of legal information organization and access strongly demands the creation of the integrated information computer net that unites all the participants of the process.

It is necessary to create corporate library legal information center on the basis of modern information and telecommunication technologies. Further PCPI activity will greatly depend on the creating of such managing technology centers that could unite all the PCPI and allow to find quickly the necessary information, provide the information not only of their own resources but also of other resources and of accumulated corporate resources.

At the end of the 2003 the Ministry of Culture of Russia published the following statistical data about the first stages of the Program implementation.⁴ Combined expenditures on the creation of all-Russia Public Centers of Legal Information net are estimated as US\$ 5,000,000. During 1998-2003 more than US \$1.2 million was spent by just the federal organizations and sponsors for organizing the regional net of centers.

There are 2129 copies of legal databases of leading producers of legal information installed and regularly operating and more than 2000 complete sets of newspapers on legal subjects have been collected. The Public Centers of Legal Information Program was presented at the Second Session of the Interstate Council of the UNESCO Program "Information for All" (April 22-24, 2003, at the headquarters of UNESCO). Our country presented the mentioned program as an example of a positive experience in the building of legal and free information society.

The Russian experience in the creation of the net of legal information centers is already very popular among CIS countries.

Conclusion. Further perspectives of the legal and business information centers development.

In 2002 the work on the integration of legal and business information resources in public libraries of Russia began and unified centers of legal and business information were being created. In Smolensk region they were the first, who began to implement the new project – the

⁴ Kuzmin E. Setting up a system of access of the citizens of Russia to legal information: results and prospects //Kuzmin E.,Demidov A.,Usachov M. //Library and information science. – 2005. - № 6. – P.14.

creation of the net of electronic centers and points of business and legal information on the basis of libraries, educational institution, centers of business support. The legal information resources used by PCPI will be integrated with the information resources of the Business Internet Portal of the Smolensk region (<http://business.admin.smolensk.ru>), and with the resources already created in the regional legal and business centers. The Smolensk experience is interesting because center services help users to orientate in the goods and services market and to defend better their rights. This initiative received the support of the Ministry of Communications of Russia in the framework of “Electronic Russia”

Governments began to create Centers of Public Access (CPA). This is one of the modifications of PCPI, offered by the Ministry of Communications. In the framework of the “Electronic Russia” Program 100 CPA have already been created in remote rural settlements. The experience of creating the specialized analytic public centers of legal information based on educational institutes (for instance, the Academy of Tourism) initiated by the Russian Committee of the UNESCO Program “Information for all” is very interesting.

At present the public centers of legal and business information in various manifestations are opened practically in all large public libraries at the regional and municipal levels and also on the basis of multiple schools, institutes, public and state institutions. They provide their services to more than one million people per year and illustrate the great demand for such centers by the population, business structures and administrations of all levels. All these centers are included in the PCPI Program.

The Partnership, “Interregional Association of Public Centers of Legal Information”, was created with the aim of organizationally uniting the centers and it was summoned to unite the efforts and the resources. The leading role in it belongs to the Russian State Library.

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The all-Russia PCPI Portal (<http://www.pcp.ru>), created by the firm “Kodeks”, functions, and it has as an objective the integration of resources and provide the net center coordination and organize the inquiry line for informing citizens.

The main aim of creating the portal was to overcome geographical and property inequality in the access to legal and business information.

Already the Partnership which unites multiple centers, and the PCPI Portal which provides informational and methodological and reference service render valuable support in ensuring their further development.

As we see, libraries answer the changes of the time and create specialized structures of information access. They have found their niche and use accumulated resources. They are close to people and know their needs. They see and show the shortcomings and demand openness of society.

Today more than 2000 libraries and other organizations of different affiliation carry out the legal and business information service for all the layers of the population and different structures of all forms of property.

Owing to the opening of the centers the new role of libraries in the life of the local community is more and more affirmed. The centers work actively on the legal education of the population and the information support of local authorities. This plays a great role in the forming of local self-government in regions. Therefore it is supposed to make access points to the information of the activity of self-government institutions in every city and regional library.

At present, when the implementation of the Program is entering a new stage, the main problem is that the already created centers function autonomously to a considerable extent. Therefore it is quite necessary to unite centers into a national information net, carry out the unification and certification of the activity of the centers, provide modern computer and communication techniques, provide the connection to qualitative communication channels and to prepare skilled man-power.

In the process of realizing the third stage governments anticipate a 100% inclusion of all the subjects of the Russian Federation (up to 2500 centers as a minimum) into the net. The Ministry of Culture of Russia, “ Spezsvyaz “ of Russia and the Russian Committee of UNESCO Program “Information for all” started the accomplishing of those tasks. In case the state gives more consideration to the Program, such results will be reached in five years. The volumes of combined special purpose investments to the joint PCPI net during this period must be not less than 500 thousand dollars a year.⁵

To conclude I would like to highlight once more that Business and Legal Information Centers are of great social value, actively acclaimed by the population and demand further development. The development and implementation experience of the Program shows that it is a beautiful opportunity for state, commercial and social structures to collaborate on wide-scale socially significant tasks collectively.

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