

## Archives in Modern Russia: Problems and Prospects

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### Archives in Modern Russia: Problems and Prospects

#### *ABSTRACT*

The article deals with the role of archives in Russia during the last two decades and its change depending on political, social, economic and public factors. The data in the text illustrate the processes and directions of the archival affair development in the Russian Federation, including an introduction of the modern program of archival informatization, the decision of problems concerning electronic records permanent storage; optimization of structure of records accepted on the state storage, increase of the social status of archives.

### Gli archivi nella Russia moderna: problemi e prospettive

#### *SINTESI*

L'articolo tratta del ruolo degli archivi in Russia durante i due ultimi decenni ed i loro cambiamenti causati da fattori politici, sociali, economici e pubblici. I dati nel testo illustrano i processi e le direzioni dello sviluppo della materia archivistica nella Federazione Russa, le decisioni sui problemi concernenti la conservazione definitiva dei documenti elettronici, l'ottimizzazione delle strutture dei documenti accettati in tali strutture, l'incremento dello status sociale degli archivi.

### Arhivi v sodobni Rusiji: težave in perspektiva

#### *IZVLEČEK*

Avtor se v prispevku osredotoča na vprašanje vloge arhivov v Rusiji v zadnjih dveh desetletjih in spremembah, ki so odvisne od političnih, družbenih, ekonomskih in javnih faktorjev. Podatki v prispevku osvetljujejo proces in smeri razvoja arhivske službe v Ruski federaciji, vključno s predstavitevjo sodobnega arhivskega informacijskega programa, odločitev v zvezi s problematiko dolgoročne hrambe elektronskega gradiva, optimizacijo strukture gradiva, ki je bilo sprejeto v državno hrambo in krepitev družbenega statusa arhivov.

### Архивы в современной России: проблемы и перспективы

#### *АБСТРАКТНЫЙ*

В докладе представлено изменение роли архивов в России в последние два десятилетия в зависимости от политических, социально-экономических и общественных факторов. Приводятся данные, иллюстрирующие данный процесс. Представлены направления развития архивного дела в Российской Федерации, включая внедрение современной программы информатизации архивного дела, решение проблем долговременного хранения электронных документов; оптимизации состава документов, принимаемых на государственное хранение, повышение социального статуса архивов.

From the moment Russia has gained a new statehood, the role of archives in the country over the last two decades has changed depending on political, social, economic and public factors.

### Political factors

In the former century Russia has changed three times the statehood and twice - the social and economic structure. Certainly, all this has influenced on archives. What are positive and negative conditions influencing on archival preservation, acquisition and usage of a documentary heritage of our

country - answers to these questions have not abstract informative character, but a vital practical value. The sharpness of this situation for the Russian historians and archivists can be explained as they still are citizens of the world state that has a thousand-year history of the country together with its aboriginal population.

The most significant internal political factors influencing on the archival affair were: disintegration of the USSR and the Communist Party's disappearance from the political arena, acceptance of the Russian Federation legislation on archives, and also the arise of political processes, caused by the new constitution connected with formation of local government, and new organization of the Russian Federation's subjects.

Disintegration of the USSR has predetermined the transfer of the central state archives of the former super state - Soviet Union to the state archival service of Russia. But simultaneously this disintegration has created a real threat to the archival funds dispersion between archival services of the former union republics. The agreement about archives timely signed in 1992 between the republics has liquidated this threat. Thereby the accumulated information potential of archives of the Russian empire and the USSR was possible to keep for the future generation. The formation of advisory body of top managers of archival services of the CIS countries and the creation of the ICA Eurasian branch, adopted by the ICA executive committee in 2000 has thus played a leading part.

Acceptance of the new Constitution of the Russian Federation meant a final loss of the centralized archival system of the former country. Political processes, connected with formation of local government, the new organization of the Federation's subjects, have effected also on the archival affair. The own archival legislations began to appear in the majority of the Federation's subjects, which mainly consider local features of the organization of archival affair though in some cases suffer with the tendency to acquire more sovereignty.

The formed vertical of the archival affair's organization stimulated the forced creation of mechanisms of its maintenance on new qualitative bases, by means of the general information area creation and uniform scientific and methodical maintenance of archives.

Thus, political factors have altered archival affair of Russia, liquidated strict centralization, isolation and inaccessibility of archives of the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union, promoting archives to democratization, more openness and accessibility to a society.

### Social and economic factors

Transition of Russia to market economy and an economic crisis accompanied the process have generated a number of negative features for archives: a chronic lack of financing, low wages of workers of the state and municipal archives, absence of social security of archivists.

The introduction of archives into market economy in 1990s has some serious negative consequences for them. As a result of chronic under financing the big damage has been caused to the archival infrastructure of the country.

The breaking of former economic relations has effected not only on archival infrastructure, but also on the archival affair official standing in the country. The privatization, while passing through different branches of the economy, on the one hand, has created threat of loss of the state part of the Russian Federation Archival fund' records because the new property owners had a scornful relation to archives. On the other hand, the separate, especially valuable archival collections, able to act in the market as "goods", generated the tendency to their privatization. However the statutory acts accepted by the Russian government and by the Russian Federation's subjects have created necessary conditions for neutralization of these threats.

Economy stabilization since 2000 was positively affected upon the archival affair's infrastructure. The economic situation of the state archives improved gradually. First of all it has influenced on stable and constantly increasing (though insufficient) the archivists wages, on improvement of material maintenance of archival activities, their technical and technological maintenance. The acceptance of target programs «Archives of Russia», «Culture of Russia», «Electronic Russia» at the federal level has played a very important role, due to the mentioned above programs archives have been equipped by

modern computers and information technologies. Technical updating has allowed archives of Russia to use effectively typical program complexes in archives of federal and regional level.

In 2011 the volume of the Russian Federation Archival fund has mount to 494 million archival units. Federal archives store approximately 9% of records, state archives of the Federation' subjects - 29%, municipal archives - 13%, museums, libraries, archives of the Russian Academy of Sciences - 3%, archives of the state and municipal organizations - 4 %. There are 2594 archives (federal - 15, in the Federation's subjects - 202, in municipal -2377) and 14562 archival workers in the country.

Here again questions of archival building became actual. The building of State archive of the Sakhalin region is reconstructed and now operates, the building for State archive of the Kaliningrad region is constructed; building of State archive of the Smolensk region comes to the end; buildings of state archives for the Chuvash and Udmurt republics, the Kaluga, Novgorod, Tomsk and Ulianovsk areas are under construction. If to have a stable financing and a small increase of financial support to regions, in two or three years it will be possible to execute a noble action - as a whole to return cult buildings to religious confessions occupied by archives in former times (19 cult buildings are returned since 1991).

The formation of "not state archival sector" has begun in the years under review, providing safety storage of the temporary value records of private legal bodies. So, above one hundred of private businessmen and archival companies, working in Moscow, have a large staff, for example, more than 150 persons. The creation of noncommercial partnership «National archival association», due to the Rosarchive initiative, comes to the end. There is a hope the new creation can be transformed further to the self-adjustable organization. Its creation and the statement of modern standards of work with archival records in a private sector will allow in the long term to deal with a question on archival outsourcing for the state and municipal bodies and the organizations.

## Public factors

Democratization of the Russian society promoted realization of the rights of citizens to have an easy access to socially significant information resources. Awareness of a role of archives as repositories maintaining records of our history, giving a basis for objective studying of our past, was expressed in heightened interest of researchers, both Russian and foreign, to archival records. Archives sped up the work in the field of documentary publications; they opened exhibitions and organized meetings with the public, besides answering of researchers' requests. This area of archival activity turns archives into the independent cultural and educational centers.

The public society expects to acquire some new knowledge of the past from archives of Russia. The using of archival records so impressive on the scales and concrete results has never been existed earlier in the history of the Russian archival affair. For the last decade over 200 collections of documents and more than 150 directories about the structure and content of the Russian Federation Archival fund' records were published.

The Exhibition Hall of federal archives opened in Moscow became one of the leading educational centers of Moscow. One of its expositions has attracted more than six thousand visitors - the history of archival affair has never known it before.

Questions of access to archival records and their use are traditionally in the centre of public attention. The above mentioned questions, including declassification of archival records, are sharply putted forward by our public society. The same questions were discussed during a meeting of the President of Russia D.A. Medvedev with members of the Council on development of civil society and human rights on February 1st, 2011, in Yekaterinburg.

Rates of real declassification in 2010 have increased more than twice (near 11 thousand units of the CPSU supreme bodies and the Soviet government) in comparison with the previous period. The same rates are kept in the accepted five years' plan on the archival records declassification.

The departmental program of normalization is prepared for a wide access of users to archival records and for the expansion of an access to archives within the frames of the operating state program «The Information society. 2011-2020».

Records concerning labor period of citizens are not a part of the Russian Archival fund; but there is a steady tendency in our society to form a new type of state and municipal archives that will store labor records providing a social and legal protection of the Russian citizens and their social rights.

The Russian archives has accepted one more challenge of time due to the occurrence of new kinds and even categories of socially-legal inquiries and sometimes their booming character, and also due to the expansion of volume of this inquiries receiving from the foreign citizens. Destinies of people being in the Soviet captivity, destinies of prisoners in the fascist bondage, destinies of people deported, subjected to repression, even the destiny of the confiscated property - all this is only a part of inquiries executed by the Russian archivists in the last decades. As a whole our archives execute annually more than one million social and legal inquiries.

### Development prospects

Now we will try to imagine possible directions of archival affair and archives development in the next decade. One of sources for our representations about development of archival affair in the future is the Concept of long-term social and economic development of the Russian Federation. The purposes of the Concept's forming are - to define ways and means of steady increasing of well-being of the Russian people, to strengthen the national safety and dynamical economy development in a long-term prospect (2008-2020), to strengthen the Russian positions in the world community.

What aspects of this Concept are directly dealing with archives and archival affair? From the professional point of view they are concentrated in the Concept's section «Development of the Culture». Preservation and development of cultural area is one of the base elements providing existence of Russia as the uniform state. Formation of a uniform cultural area is the way to overcome the existed disproportions caused by various degrees of services for public needs in a sphere of culture, originating from geographical features of territories within the country.

The multinational composition of the Russian state demands to form several conditions for co-existence and interaction of various cultures as a factor of social stability and integrity of the country. Thereupon it is necessary to create the effective mechanisms that will provide the preservation of traditional national culture, museum and archival funds of the country, monuments, history and culture.

Taking into account the information character of archival activities, it is important for us to develop the information and communication technologies helping to formulate some priority problems of the archival affair development in the Russian Federation.

First of all, the archival service needs to increase its status and to expansion its competence, especially in a sphere of records management. Functions of legal regulation of archival affair, its scientific and methodical maintenance, interrelation of federal, regional and municipal levels are of great demand and special attention.

The program of informatization of archival affair should be applied corresponding to modern level of archives and records management, based on the system approach, use of typical program decisions, standards and formats of documents, and the best experience of different archives. It is expedient to support concepts of regional systems of informatization, using archival resources, including the Internet, and to improve technical equipment of archives.

Active use of the automated systems of electronic records cycling, informatization of administrative organs are leading us to the situation when considerable part of the administrative documentation is created in the form of various databases, registers, cadastres which have no paper analogues. These electronic documents are created, applied and stored only in the electronic form. The existing archival infrastructure is not capable to provide reception, storage, maintenance, safety preservation, management and control of the archival electronic documentation. Therefore there is a strong necessity in Russia to create the specialized federal archive of electronic documents (FAED). At the first stage of the FAED's work it is necessary to consider that its main aim is the creation of model of functioning on the basis of a mass of electronic copies of archival records received from federal archives, the web-information, digital photo- and video data, databases.

It is probable that in the nearest future archivists will give more attention to a problem of the records structure optimization transferred to the state storage, to the improvement of the criteria of records selection, to the appraisal of records value with attraction of a wide range of experts.

The state archivist today is still considered by the public society as the worker of social sphere who provides a social protection of citizens, as the official person who gains the retrospective information for the decision making, as the culture worker who educates a society, as the scientist and historian who reminds about our past, as the keeper of the citizens rights, who preserves official state papers, and, at last, as the manager of the largest information resource of the country.

Our immediate task consists of forming of the awareness in the state and society, that our profession is unique and important, that archives play a very important role in a country and state life.

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## SUMMARY

The article describes the change of a role of archives in Russia in the last two decades and shows that the process was defined by political, social, economic and public factors. The most significant political factors affecting upon the archival affair were: disintegration of the USSR and the Communist Party's disappearance from political arena, acceptance of the Russian Federation Legislation on Archives, the new Constitution of the Russian Federation and also following processes concerned with formation of local government and new administrative organization of the Russian Federation's subjects. Transition of Russia to a market economy and an economic crisis has originated a number of negative consequences for archives. Negative factors accompanied the economy development have been eliminated. The data in the text illustrates this process. **Democratization of the Russian society** promoted the realization of the rights of citizens on an easy access to information resources. **Archives** intensified their work in the field of documentary publications, organization of exhibitions and meetings with the public, becoming the independent cultural and educational centers. Priority objects of the archival affair development in the Russian Federation should become: increasing of the archival status and expansion of the competence of archival service, modernization of legal base and creation of modern scientific and methodical maintenance of archival affair; modernization of material and technical base of archives, introduction of the modern program of archival informatization; decision of problems of long-term storage of electronic documents; optimization of structure of the records accepted on the state storage, organization of system of training and improvement of professional skill of archival staff, increasing of the social status and level of social security of archivists.

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