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Electronic Signatures Coming

By Olga Solovyova

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The country is one step closer to a new electronic signature system now that the FSB has taken steps to amend the 2011 electronic-signature law.

An electronic signature is special electronic information that is attached to other electronic information, such as electronic documents. Its goal is to eliminate the use of paper documents and reduce lines at government agencies.

The order published by the FSB on Friday provided for the adoption of a number of bylaws to detail the conditions and procedures for the use of electronic signatures. The bylaws are at various stages of preparedness, the Communications and Press Ministry reported.

The new law will replace a 2002 electronic-signature law.

"Due to fundamental changes in the conceptual approach to the use of electronic signatures and a significant number of innovations, updating the electronic digital signature law was not possible," a Communications and Press Ministry spokesman told The Moscow Times.

The 2011 law, which is not yet in force, gives a new definition to the electronic signature and divides it into three types: simple, enhanced-unqualified and enhanced-qualified. The difference is in the level of information security.

Both laws will be in force until July 1, 2012.

Conceptual and technical limitations prevented the old law from going into widespread use, the explanatory note for the new electronic-signature law stated.

Electronic signatures are used by companies and private persons while receiving certain government services.

The simple electronic signature is unencrypted, such as the password for an electronic mailbox.

Simple and enhanced-unqualified signatures are used only in document management within a company or between two or more contractors by agreements.

"We have used it since 2003 in systems like the bank-client and Internet-banking [interfaces]," a VTB spokesperson told The Moscow Times.

Those types of signatures will not be used in electronic tenders or legal relations between the government and companies, or between the government and individuals. Only the enhanced-qualified signature can be used in those settings.

The enhanced-electronic signature consists of a key signature, key-signature certificate and special CSP – Cryptography Service Provider — program module. This is the only type of electronic signature that is legally equivalent to a signature on a paper document.

Electronic signatures will be obtained from special certification centers, but only certification centers accredited by the FSB will be able to create enhanced-qualified electronic signatures.

At present there are 430 certification centers in Russia, and none of them have been accredited.

"These requirements have not yet been determined," said Igor Nakonechny, project manager for Crypto-Pro, a company specializing in cryptographic information security development.

The Communications and Press Ministry spokesman said the requirements are expected by the end of spring. All electronic digital signatures now in use should be converted into enhanced-qualified signatures by July 1, 2012.

Currently 300,000 companies use electronic signatures, the Moscow government information technology department reported.

"[Electronic signatures] are used in a variety of systems: document management, electronic tenders, on the Gosuslugi.ru website, to submit reports to the Federal Tax Service and elsewhere," said Georgy Afanasyev, E-key.ru certification center general director.

The cost depends on what the signature is used for. All services could cost at least 20,000

rubles ($680) per person, he said.

Certificates are issued annually, said Irina Ilbovnik, National Certification Center sales department head. A key-signature certificate will cost 2,450 rubles per year. The special USB drive will cost 800 rubles, and the Crypto-Pro CSP module will cost 1,800 rubles.

Price levels are not regulated by the Communications and Press Ministry, but certification centers determine their own prices, the ministry spokesman said.

Rostelecom was the first company to issue electronic signatures to private persons for use on the Gosuslugi.ru website, which it developed and provides various government services to individuals and companies.

“The main problem ... in Russia is that Western (American) programs are already integrated into the [American] system and software. Russian [programs] are not integrated anywhere,” Mikhail Yemelyannenkov, managing partner of the Yemelyannenkov, Popova & Partners consulting company, said in written comments.

Russia has a long way to go to expand the use of the electronic signature, as a lot of barriers to it remain. “[It is a] lack of legal regulation of electronic management in general, not only the use of electronic signatures and ... end users ... who sometimes do not want to use an electronic signature instead of an ordinary signature. All these are difficulties with Russian cryptography. Finally, it is just expensive,” he wrote.

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