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About 40,000 Applications Submitted for Electronic Cards

By The Moscow Times

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Roughly 40,000 Russians have submitted applications to receive universal electronic cards — a measure championed by former President Dmitry Medvedev as a means of cutting through red tape.

The state-controlled company charged with overseeing the initiative said in a statement Monday that more than 22,000 universal electronic cards had been produced so far and that regional authorities were working to ensure that the cards could be used across the country.

The cards can be used as a combined driver's license, car insurance certificate, ATM card and migration document.

The electronic cards, which have been issued to applicants since the start of the year, were meant to be mandatory for all citizens from January next year, but early last month Communications and Press Minister Nikolai Nikiforov said that the cards would be voluntary.

Observers interpreted the government's decision to shrink the scope of the project as an embarrassment for Medvedev, who announced plans for the cards with great fanfare in spring 2011.

Regional officials blamed the decision to amend the project on the federal government for not allocating sufficient funds, while skeptics pointed out that the cards raised serious security concerns. The Universal Electronic Cards company is jointly owned by Sberbank, UralSib, Ak Bars and Citronics.

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