

Modernizing the relationship between Levels of Governance: the experience of Russia

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Introduction

The process of modernizing the relationship between Levels of Governance: in Russia in the last ten years has been characterized by a few contradictions. The example of the programme “Dialogue” in the North-Western of Russia, which I analyze in this article helps disclose the most important of those contradictions. One of the problems- the process of decentralization, on the one hand, and reluctance on behalf of the incumbents to give up power, on the other (Leskov, Shevcov, 2001). Contemporary Russian Federation includes 89 subjects, 21 national administrative units (national republics), and 66 territorial units (oblasts, avtonomniy okrugs, krais) as well as two cities of Federal significance - Moscow and St Petersburg each of which forming a separate subject of the Federation. Transition to federalism, which was started in post-Soviet times by president Yeltsin was proceeding with significant difficulties (Mitrohin, 1997:96). In the process of political bargaining between the subjects of the Federation and the Federal Center the so-called asymmetric federalism emerged, whereby national republics received most rights and privileges compared to other federative units; not infrequently the legislation of the national republics contradicted the federal legislation (Boltenkova, 1996:24), which was most vividly revealed in the issues related to local government.

This made president V.Putin launch a new administrative reform of 2000. One of the major moves was the creation of seven big federal regions (in this text “region”), each of which united geographically and economically close federal subjects (in this text “subject of RF”). In each subject was introduced a new institution of the Executive Representative of the President of the Russian Federation. As initially envisaged the activity of the Executive Representative was to be limited to control over the legislative

process in the subjects of the federation and to monitor the compliance of laws to the Constitution and the Federal Laws, but in the process of reforms the power of the new institution has significantly increased. The example of the North-Western Region of Russia, the region which unites 11 subjects of the federation with the administrative center in St.-Petersburg is interesting in this respect. Here the Executive Representative of the President of the Russian Federation V. Cherkesov proposed a programme aimed at improving various levels of governance, between the civil society and the state.

The subject of this analysis are the aims, goals and principles of the programme, as declared in the official documents, and the concrete results and achievements which can be observed 1,5 years after the launch of the pilot. I will also analyze the negative effects of the program, which emerged in the process of implementation and the way the main ideas and principles of the programme were changed under the influence of political and administrative culture. At the moment the pilot is still in the process of implementation; it is too early to draw final conclusions and make evaluations, no detailed academic analysis has been carried out so far.

The empirical data for this analysis is drawn from the sociological surveys on the North-Western Region, the data published on the internet site of the Dialogue programme, official sites of the subjects of the federation comprising the North-Western Region of Russia (Murmanskaya Oblast (area), Vologodskaya Oblast (area), Pskovskaya Oblast (area), Arhangelskaya Oblast (area), Leningrad Oblast (area), Republics of Komi and Karelia, and St Petersburg), sites of the leading newspapers and independent news agencies. The paper will also analyze notes, reports of the administration of St.- Petersburg which the author had access to being an advisor to the Committee for interaction with Local Government of St.-Petersburg Administration.

Unintended consequences of the decentralisation process.

The problem of decentralisation was one of the greatest challenges for the post-communist Russia. Starting from 1991 a series of administrative reforms has been undertaken, aiming at decentralizing Russian territories. The process was complicated and painful, as there was no clear idea of how to organize the reforms (Mitrohin, 1997:123; Valentey, 1996:56). The legal norms stumbled over political culture, as Russia has historically been a centralized state, where powerful state apparatus and a strong central authority were regarded as positive value. The administrative reforms 2000-2002 emphasized the creation of favorable conditions for the development of civil society; the latter was envisaged to become a prerequisite for successful decentralization reform. Local government was seen as a major agency for facilitating the formation of civil society.

The interaction of levels of governance is complicated by traditions of territorial division. Russia has a division base on both national and administrative-territorial principles. In Russia as well as in other countries of the CIS during reforms the principles of state governance were changed. The Constitution of 1993 separated local authorities from the state administration (Art. 12, Constitution of Russia). This resulted in new difficulties of coordination between levels of governance, created obstacles for the devolution of powers and favorable conditions for development of corruption at the local level.

The basic purpose of the Putin's reforms of 2000-2002 was to increase the efficiency of public management and governance (Smorgunov, 2002:455). The priority direction of activity of the Russian system of state governance concerning local governance today is support of its development as a major agency of civil society and maintenance of responsible government. Transparency, inclusiveness and close interaction with the population were seen as the major conditions for effective governance. A number of federal laws, programs at the Federal and local levels were dedicated to this issue.

The Programme ‘Dialogue’ as a way to improve multi-level governance in the North-Western Region of Russia

North-Western region of Russia unites 11 subjects of the Federation. It is one the most industrialized, populated, westernized regions in Russia. In the Soviet period it the state-society relations in the region, likewise in the entire Soviet Union were characterized by strong alienation of the state and the population (Volkova, 2000: 169). The consequences of this alienation were the weakness of civil society and state-citizen relations. In spite of the fact that during the democratic reforms (1991-1999) in the times of Yeltsin’s government in Russia a system of local self-government was created, deficiencies in the legislation and lack of democratic traditions resulted in ineffectiveness of local government, high level of corruption, red tape and inefficiency.

To address those problems, in the North-Western Region of Russia was developed and implemented a special programme ‘Dialogue’, worked out by the apparatus of the Representative of the President of RF in the North-Western region. The programme was launched in April 2001 as a pilot project; after the completion of the pilot (the time of completion was not specified) it was intended to roll it out to the rest of Russia.

The main objective of the ‘Dialogue’ Programme was to improve the relations between central and regional levels of government in Russia (www.dialogspb.ru). This program was supposed to support the public initiatives and encourage participation of the citizens in governance of the territory. The launch of the programme was determined by several factors. First of all, it was aimed at facilitating federalism and construction of new relations between various levels of government, in particular, between the national and regional levels. Secondly, it was aimed at improving the creation of the coordination between levels of government and a lack of communication with the citizens (Cherkesov, 2001). Thirdly, it was seen as a mechanism of protecting the Russian society from the possible of revival of totalitarianism.

The implementation of the project

The project involved the following phases:

End of 2000- March 2001 development of the program by the experts of the apparatus of the Executive Representative and incorporation of the amendments of the Public Chamber of the North-Western Region.

2001- April launch of the pilot, opening of the first experimental reception chambers of Vologodskaya and Archangelskaia Oblast, preparation of the methodological recommendations for the staff working with appeals of the citizens.

2001 – opening of the chambers in St Petersburg and other subjects of Russian Federation and North-Western Regions of Russia.

In the process of implementation the project was continuously corrected and specified; originally only a general concept of the programme was worked out, the details largely depended on local environment. Each of the 11 subjects of the federation offered its own model of implementation (www.murman.ru; www.gov.karelia.ru). Thus, Vologodskaya Oblast where the first chambers were opened played an active role in the development of methodological recommendations and helped estimate the equipment needs for reception chambers and the schedules of work with the citizens. Thus it was established that accept for the administrator of the chamber who was to work with the citizens and register appeals it was important to organize legal consultations free of charge. As there were no special funds allocated to the implementation of the program accept for the information support, seminars and trainings, it was decided to set up a charitable fund to raise money, which in each subject of the Federation was found in different ways. For instance in St Petersburg out of 111 local governments during the first year of the pilot only 20 joined the public chamber programme, offering offices, allocating resources and offering other help for ‘Dialogue’(www.rusk.ru ; www.s-pb.ru).

The evaluation of the program was carried out by the stuff members of the apparatus of the Executive representative, but such a large scale programme could not

have passed unnoticed by the politicians.

A group of political scientists, sociologists and lawyers was set up which was looking for ways to overcome the above mentioned problems. The experts from the staff of the Executive Representative of the President of Russia in the region declared that ‘Dialogue’ will primarily be a public information system of interaction between public agencies and the citizens living in this region. But the most radical opponents of the program, such as the MP of State Duma Y. Rybakov who in the program of radio “Liberty” and the political commentators of the Agency of federal Investigations, strongly criticized the project, blaming it for promoting the culture of dependency of the citizens on the state structures, state paternalism, even for the attempts at reviving total control over the society (www.svoboda.org).

According to the original design, the program "Dialogue" involves the creation of a network of public reception chambers in conjunction with the Executive Representative of the President of RF which carries out citizen surveys on a regular basis (Methodological Recommendations, 2001). Originally universities, colleges, industrial enterprises, NGOs and local governments were offered to participate in the project (www.vedomosty.luga.ru; www.vedomosty.spb.ru; www.info.vyborg.ru; www.rbc.ru). This was supposed to help activate the institutes of civil society and ensure fruitful dialogue between them and the state institutes of government. But in reality, it turned out that the majority of public reception chambers were opened on the basis of bodies of local governments. Currently, the local authorities have become the most active participants of the programme. The surveys carried out at local level are very successful in the sense that they get a high return rate. This is related not only to the development of the local authorities, but also to the fact that the local authorities felt helpless in the situation they found themselves in. Therefore, ‘Dialogue’ was seen as a chance to elevate their status improve their reputation in the local population (www.nvrem.dux.ru).

The institution responsible for carrying out the program is the Representative of

the President of RF in the North-Western region, who has to report the results directly to the President of the RF. The major structural element of the program is a working group functioning on a voluntary basis and set up in conjunction with the Representative of the President. The decisions in the group are taken in an open forum, without any clear procedure. The working group includes:

- the representatives of bodies of state authority of all subjects of Federation in NWR,
- the federal inspectors,
- the representatives of Public Prosecutor,
- the representatives of local authorities in the North-Western region,
- the representatives of mass media (www.dialogspb.ru).

The financial and legal support for the receptions is carried out jointly by the local authorities and the apparatus of the Representatives.

The receptions are incorporated in a uniform information network which collects references, offers and complaints of the citizens. The resolution of the problem a citizen addresses the local government with is controlled by the main Federal inspector and his assistants. Each of the 11 subjects of the North-Western Region has a central public reception chamber open, where the information on the requests is processed and summarized.

According to the program design, its main goal is to create conditions for wide and open discussion of vital problems within the subjects of Federation and the local authorities (economic programs, investment projects). This became particularly urgent in St Petersburg, the center of the North-Western region, the city which before its 300th anniversary to be celebrated in 2003 was given a strong impulse for social, economic and political development (www.300online.ru; www.dialog-21.ru).

Another major goal of the program was informing the population on the activity of the federal authorities, legislative initiatives, economic programs and projects. According to the surveys carried out by sociologists of the Universities of the greatest difficulty of the past government reforms in Russia were badly organised information

campaigns which could explain the citizens the essence of those reforms as well as lack of trust on behalf of the citizens to the state (Achkasov, 1997:173).

This program was supposed to support of the public initiatives and encourage participation of the citizens in governance of the territory. Important track was the information exchange between local authorities and the local population. A network of chambers was intended to help reveal the important problems of region on the basis of the analysis of information and to ensure the attraction of resources of the Representative of the President for their resolution.

First results of the project

As a result, a wide network of public receptions (now about 100) was created which consulted the citizens and collected feedback from them. Mass Media played an active role in the process of the creation of the new identity of the citizens of different subjects of the region, giving them a new sense of belonging to the “North West”. For these purposes in October 2000 an Association of Media of the North-Western was founded as an independent journalistic organization aimed at protecting the corporate interests and uniting the efforts for creating a unified information space of the region. The association which unites more than 60 leading representatives of Mass Media has become a recognized and influential media structure of the region. Among the collective members of the Association are the league of journalists of St Petersburg and the Novgorodian members regional organization “Press”. An agreement has been signed on cooperation between the Association and the Executive Representative of the President, which identifies the main strategies and tracks of joint effort on forming the unified information space in the region. An agreement was reached with the “Open Society Institute” on mutual educational programmes for journalists and other local mutually beneficial units.

The Association of Mass Media in the North-West has developed and

implemented a number of journalistic projects. One of them ‘The Business Choice of Press’, aimed at finding and supporting new leaders in various branches of industry, producing regional TV programs, unified newspaper issues, internet-radio. A special journalistic project “Northern Ring” has got wide resonance; this project is aimed at supporting the cultural and historical monuments of the region. Within the framework of these projects the journalists have already visited St Petersburg, Pskov, Archangelsk and Solovki (www.arhpress.ru; www.arhpress.ru; www.win.pskov.ru).

Another important aspect became the creation of a uniform information network, Internet links and Web-site of the program. This allowed to attract young people to the discussion of the problems of the region, ensured transparency and openness of all the processes within the program itself. The information net ensured government support and effective realization within the program such specialized projects as ‘Dialogue young’ (http://www.dialogspb.ru/pr_unior.html) and ‘Dialogue of culture’.

The programme “Dialogue young” emerged after a group of school children addressed the public chamber asking then to organize a trip to Russian mainland, where they have never been before. The main goal of the programme was the development of the optimal models of interaction between children and adults in various spheres of activity. It unified the efforts of various people (adults and children), organizations, Mass media, institutions (educational, governmental, non-governmental) for achieving the goals set in the project, for the creation of a unified ‘dialogue’ humanitarian space in the North-West.

Within the framework of this programme in 2001 the following activities took place:

- A consultative meeting of the representatives of youth organizations, educational institutions of St Petersburg with the Executive Representative of the President V. Cherkesov and the Federal Inspector N. Vinnichenko for promoting the project ‘Dialogue of Young’ (october).

- A meeting of schoolchildren from Kaliningrad with the Executive Representative of the President in the North-West in St Petersburg (November 2-5, St Petersburg)
- The development of conceptual basis for the project ‘Dialogue of Young’ which incorporated the experience of the pilot projects (November)
- Organizing the action ‘New Year’s meetings’ (December 26-28, Great Ustug)
- Contest “The Best Essay” for school children of 10-11 grades of the North-West “Dialogue with the president of Russia” (December-January, North-Western Region)

In 2002 the following projects were implemented

- Publication of a book ‘Dialogue with the President of Russia’
- Exhibition of childrens’ drawings on the web-site (March-April)
- Organization of high school student exchange in the framework of the summer project “Dialogue of Young” and volunteers summer camp “School for Leaders” (June-August)
- Organization of a seminar for adults and children. Project ‘Dialogue of young’ (December)
- Organization of the action “A Present to St Petersburg” (a project of presenting a monument to the city).

For the year 2003 the following events are planned:

- Organization of a meeting of adults and children “Christmas meetings” (January)
- The analysis of materials, preparation and issuing of information bulletin (January-February)

In St.-Petersburg on October 9 an Interregional Vacancies Fair started. The initiative belonged to the city Employment Agency and the Federation of the Trade Unions of the St.- Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast, in conjunction and with support of the ‘Dialogue’ programme. The interest of ‘Dialogue’ in this involvement was in that vacancies were offered not only by the organizations and enterprises of St.- Petersburg and the Leningrad Oblast; Representatives of almost all regions of North-West participated. The staff of the recruitment agencies were looking for qualified specialists

for their regions, and brought with them the resumes of their local specialists who wished to get a job in St Petersburg. The total number of vacancies of the Fair reached 100.000. From St Petersburg only 180 enterprises participated.

Within the framework of the “Dialogue programme” in cooperation with the Youth Employment Agency and the Department of the Federal Service of employment in St.-Petersburg teenage brigades for city development were organized. These brigades helped employ more than 100 teenagers in the 5 districts of the city, who were given a chance to contribute to the programme of public value of preparing the city for the 300th anniversary.

The project ‘Cadre Reserve’ programme was developed and is currently implemented (www.rusproject.ru) within the framework of the ‘Dialogue’ which is aimed at finding employment for the young people in the industry, small and middle-sized businesses, finding among young St.-Petersburgers potential leaders in different fields- state and municipal government, business as well as involving more actively the young professionals in the work of state politics and economics. The evaluation of the results of the first stage of this project will take place in the beginning of December within the framework of the next Vacancy Fair.

The organizers of the contest were the Fund for support of the ‘Dialogue programme’ and the interregional non-governmental organization ‘Association of specialists of state and municipal governance’. The participation in the contest was free of charge, and the funds for organization were provided by the organizers, as well as raised from the private contributions and sponsors. Young petersburgers aged 21-33 participated, who were employed in various branches of industry, state and municipal governance, working for the NGOs, students finishing their education.

The contest was aimed at raising the prestige of state service at all levels of governance and finding potential leaders among the young professionals. The vacancies for the contest were offered by the enterprises of St Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast,

including such industrial giants as ‘Krasnyi Oktyabr’, ‘Maksidom’, ‘Big Gostinny Gvor’ and ‘Irorskij Zavod’.

Assessment of the programme

An important achievement was the organization of legal partnership with public organizations, NGOs, and business. But as the program became a bold experiment and its separate are still in the state of improvement, it was decided to create an expert group for the analysis of results of the program.

The experts were given the task to evaluate the success of the program in assisting the regional and local agencies in solving important problems such as the reform of a housing-municipal services, protection of the rights of the consumers, town-planning policies, etc.

This part of the program was important as the question emerges whether it is possible to use ‘Dialogue’ in the other six regions in Russia (78 subjects of Federation).

On the one hand, some important results have been achieved: for instance ‘Dialogue’ created a uniform structure of the presidential and public control over development of regions, actions of regional and local authorities.

The local authorities received state support for further development and became more accountable to the citizens. More effective use of resources of Representative in region was achieved, which was vital due to the fact that the system of Representatives changes considerably in the course of reforms 2000-2002.

Information and legal support of the population has been achieved which is urgent in the situation of low level of trust with the majority of the population of Russia. So this programme improved the connections between the subjects of federation inside the North-West (www.rusk.ru).

But in the other side, in the process of implementing the program some serious violations have been reported, which were very dangerous for the development of the democratic system of governance in Russia.

In the system of government of the Russian Federation their appeared a new level of governance, a new bureaucratic structure, which aims at expanding its staff and at acquiring additional was funding. They are largely determined by the previous experience and traditions of state government and political culture in Russia (Achkasov, 197). Above all, in the course of implementation of the program inner clashes of a variety of actors, social, and even criminal groups has been revealed.

Given the political and administrative culture, there exists a danger of transforming of dialogue into monologue: imposing of policy Central on the regions. Also one should not forget that geographical, socio-economic, political conditions of the Russian regions are different: one model may not work elsewhere therefore, a serious critical analysis and adjustment are needed, according to the specificity of the each region.

The active participation of local governments during realization of the program is also characterized by some negative tendencies. So the interaction directly with a presidential vertical has given to some municipal formations of the basis for wrongful pressure on regional executive authority (www.kurier.karelia.ru; www.pravdasevera.ru), has created conditions for corruption. It promoted development of the paternalism and loss of independence of local communities.

The monitoring system of the programme is insufficient. The structure of the programme is subject to corruption. In Murmansk and Arkhangelsk oblast the proceedings on the facts of excess of service powers both bribery of the organizers and participants of public receptions took place.

As an example one could quote the famous scandal in the Archangelskaya oblast, directly related to the ‘Dialogue’ programme. The State Federal Inspector A. Ermakov created a ‘Fund for support of the Dialogue programme’. The Charter of the fund

stipulates that the participants voluntarily and forever donate their money and property for the development of the programme. In other words the fund collected the money from local businessmen. Archangelsk became the first city where in fact on behalf of the President a forced collection of donations was organized.

The political expert of ‘Nezavisimaya Gazeta’ A. Izmailov who analyzed this situation on 15.08.2002 gave a negative evaluation of the basic documents of the programme (‘Methodological Recommendations for the work of public reception chambers of the Chief Federal Inspector within the framework of the ‘Dialogue programme’). In his opinion the programme ‘Dialogue’ in the North-West forms an information-analytical structure which is acting on behalf of the president of Russia, but which is related to the civil servants, operating the criminal money (www.ipc-spb.ru).

Except for that, during of last election in legislative assembly Leningradskaiia oblasts and during the election in legislative assembly of St.-Petersburg it was found out, that the public receptions were used for additional propaganda and rendering of pressure on the citizens. These facts have caused active criticism of the public (www.info.vyborg.ru; www.vedomosty.spb.ru; www.rtr-tv.spb.ru; www.nv-nw.narod.ru; www.kandidat.ru; www.nvrem.dux.ru; www.novayagazeta.spb.ru; www.rbc.ru; www.refer.ru; www.newspb.ru; www.rusk.ru; www.vedomosty.luga.ru; www.zaks.ru).

The Deputy of the Legislative Assembly of St Petersburg I. Rimmert notes that many interested individuals are trying to use the chambers as a tool for political struggle, and the Deputy of the Legislative Assembly I. Mikhailov said that the programme ‘Dialogue’ is a creation of political technologists and is selling its trademark for political purposes (http://www.zaks.ru/ru/article.thtml?a_id=470). D. Savel’ev, a political scientist draws a conclusion that initially the programme was projected as a political resource of the President in the North-West and the public reception chambers were to become electoral units of for the candidates loyal to the Federal Inspector (06.11.2002, www.flb.ru).

Conclusions

In the conclusion I should note that the interesting and inconsistent experience of North-Western region was an attempt of search of ways of improvement of interaction between the state, local authorities and civil society. Despite of some positive moments in this experience, probably, it should not used in others six regions of Russia.

First of all, today North-West region is one of most developed regions, where there is an efficient information infrastructure, systems of the communications, sufficient material maintenance, all these contributed to the program. But also, negative tendencies are too serious and require the additional scientific study and a perfection of system.

The reforms in a history of Russia always were started by the central authority. So there was in a case the program "Dialogue". Despite of difficulties during the realisation of projects, these reforms "from the centre" created conditions and further promoted the development of political and administrative culture of the population. In this case during the process of realisation of the programme the role of the population in local governance has increased.

Certainly, the experience of the North-Western region was taken into account by development of the project of new municipal reform in Russia. This project was offered by the President and it is on consideration of Parliament (Federal Assembly). It means, that the project will come into force in 2005. This project also is directed on improvement of interaction between the levels of government, but it does not plan the creation of any additional bureaucratic structures.

I believe, that the experience of our region is useful to other regions. But it would be better, if the tasks which were decided by 'Dialogue' would manage to be decided by association of resources of local authorities.

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Internet sites

Institute or project	Subject of RF (North-West region)	Site
The ‘Dialogue’ Programme	St.Petersburg	www.dialogspb.ru
<u>Programme “E-</u> <u>St.Petersburg”</u>	St.Petersburg	www.dialog-21.ru
Personnel reserve of the program “Dialogue ”	St.Petersburg	www.rusproject.ru
Official site of government of Republic Karelia	Republic Karelia	www.gov.karelia.ru
Newspaper “Vedomosty” t. Luga	Leningradskia oblast	www.vedomosty.luga.ru
News agency NEWSpb. RU	St.Petersburg	www.newspb.ru
Arhangelskaia oblasts press	Arhangelskaia oblast	www.arhpress.ru
Legislative Assembly of St.Petersburg	St.Petersburg	www.zaks.ru
Trade unions	St.Petersburg	www.proforg.ru
News agency	St.Petersburg	www.s-pb.ru
News agency “Russian Line”	St.Petersburg	www.rusk.ru

Newspaper "Krasniy Sever"	Vologodskaya oblast	www.krassever.ru
News agency	St.Petersburg	www.refer.ru
Newspaper “Novaya Gazeta”	St.Petersburg	www.novayagazeta.spb.ru
News agency of Murmanskaya oblast	Murmanskaya oblast	www.murman.ru
Newspaper “Nevskoe Vrema”	St.Petersburg	www.nvrem.dux.ru
<u>300-летие Петербурга</u> <u>300online.RU</u>	St.Petersburg	www.300online.ru
Newspaper “Pravda Severa”	Republic Komi	www.prvdasevera.ru
Newspaper “Severniy Kur’er”	Republic Karelia	www.kurier.karelia.ru
News agency ‘Vibori’	St.Petersburg	www.kandidat.ru
Agency of federal investigations		www.flb.ru
News agency	St.Petersburg	www.ipc-spb.ru
News agency of Pskovskaya oblast	Pskovskaya oblast	www.koi.pskov.ru
News agency “RosBisnesKonsalting”	St.Petersburg	www.rbc.ru
News agency “North-West News”	St.Petersburg	www.nv-nw.narod.ru
Official site of	Pskovskaya oblast	www.win.pskov.ru

Pskovskaia oblast		
The ‘Dialogue’ in Karelia	Karelia	www.dialog.onego.ru
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TV program “Vesty”	St.Petersburg	www.rtr-tv.spb.ru
Newspaper “St.Petersburg Vedomosty”	St.Petersburg	www.vedomosty.spb.ru
Newspaper “Vedomosty” t.Vyborg	Leningradskia oblast	www.info.vyborg.ru
News agency of Republic Karelia	Republic Karelia	www.karelia.ru