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## IREX Short-Term Grant Research Report: October 30, 20002

### *1. Topic of research and countries visited:*

The central question of this project is: How are state institutions transformed and what is the role of international assistance in institutional reform? In other words, how does the process of organizational restructuring actually work and what types of actors (domestic elites, international organizations, etc.) and constraints (formal or informal rules, resources, technology, etc.) are most important to the process of building state institutions?

In this project, I investigate the transformation over the last 15 years of the Russian State Statistical Committee (Goskomstat). Goskomstat is of interest because it is made up of former-soviet bureaucratic organizations which have had to adapt to the changing demands of a new political, social, and economic system. The two major tests of Goskomstat's institutional transformation have been the shift to a system of national accounts in the early 1990s, and most recently, the organization of the first post-Soviet Russian census. With the support of the IREX Short-Term Grant I was able to travel to Russia to observe the census.

### *2. Relevance and contribution to the field (scholarly impact and policy significance):*

The multi-faceted institutional transformation of state statistical institutions in Russia is an excellent window into the process of institutional development. I hope to document, in a systematic manner, the course of reform and development in the institution. My findings should clarify the roles of specific actors and the constraints they faced in transforming Goskomstat. This research will be applicable to other studies of institutional development and international assistance, both in the post-communist world and in other contexts.

The relevance of the transformation of Goskomstat on US policy is threefold: First as described above, the experience of Goskomstat will give US policy-makers better insight into the process of institutional development, which will affect US policy not only towards Russia, but towards all countries engaged in political and economic reform. Second, because of the important role of international assistance in the transformation of Goskomstat, the experience of Goskomstat examined in

this project will inform the debate over how best to manage aid directed at institution building. Third, because information is crucial to sound policies, the data produced by Goskomstat, including census as well as macro-economic statistics, will continue to be important to US foreign policy towards Russia. And, to the extent that US policy makers have a better sense of how those data are constructed, they will have a more accurate understanding on which to base policy decisions.

### *3. Summary of approach and methodology:*

Because the goal of this project is to gain a more intimate understanding of how institutional transformation works, a case-study approach is required. Goskomstat was chosen as a case for three primary reasons: First, it is a state institution whose importance to questions of political and economic reform and public policy outcomes cannot be overstated. Second, while the organization as a whole has undergone radical change, the effects of particular attempts at change and the performance of different sectors of the organization have been varied. This variation within one organization allows us to hold certain variables constant, while examining the effect of others, allowing for more rigorous analysis. Third, the context of international cooperation and assistance in transforming Goskomstat provides an opportunity to understand the effect of international actors on domestic institutional development. Research for this project will consist of interviews with Goskomstat officials, and examination of material in the Archive of the Economy and the Goskomstat library. I began research on this project in the fall of 2001, and hope to complete all interviews and archival work by summer 2003.

### *4. Summary of research findings and preliminary conclusions:*

This research trip was specifically focused on the census and Goskomstat's role in organizing it. I thought that Goskomstat put a lot of effort into publicizing the census. There were ads on TV, public transportation (metro, trolley buses, and trams), public billboards, and signs inside storefronts and other public buildings. Most people I talked to were aware that the census was going on, and most said they were planning to participate.

In my view, the Russian media's coverage of the census was overly negative. There were lots of hyperbolic stories about how the census was corrupt, how Goskomstat was inept, and how the data from the census would be useless. I think these reports are largely exaggerated. And, I think it's more symptomatic of the pessimism and cynicism of the Russian media than of the particularities of the census. The quality of the data from the census should be judged when it is available. As for the process, my view is largely positive, given the resource constraints and large challenges (historical legacies, geography, weak state capacity, etc.) that Goskomstat has to deal with.

It seemed to me that there might be a problem with over-counting due to people being able to register for their family members. I witnessed people registering for other family members at census offices, and I talked to people who had others register for them. It is not that people would register themselves more than once, but that family members would inadvertently do this for them. However, this potential problem in theory can be solved by cross-checking of forms.

Many people I talked with thought the Passport Office (passportny stol) has all of information on people already, or that other state agencies both have and share information; e.g. that the Ministry of the Interior, the Police, the Tax authorities, etc., all share information with Goskomstat. This is really remarkable. It shows that most people really have no understanding the basic boundaries between state organizations. Moreover, if such sharing of information is actually occurring is suggest a real problem with any sort of "checks and balances" or protection of citizens' privacy among Russian government agencies. It's not that I think there are no problems in the Russian bureaucracy, but sharing of Goskomstat data is a very serious charge.

5. *Suggestions for future scholarly research agendas:*

In the 1990s many scholars, including myself, took the opportunity to expand our understanding of Russian politics and society by moving out of Moscow and examining local and regional politics. We also tried to integrate studies of Russia into conventional comparative and American politics frameworks, by studying institutions such as the legislature, parties, and elections. However, we are now at a point where we have only minimal information or expertise on the Russian State (beyond the institutions of the presidency, legislature, or parties); and yet at the same time we repeatedly look to the state and the process of state building as instrumental in the economic and political transformation of Russia. To better understand these processes in Russia and around the world, much more work is needed on the transformation of state bureaucratic institutions, including statistical agencies, tax authorities, police, regulatory agencies, etc.

6. *Recommendations for the US policy community:*

In an era of belief in "regime change" as a solution to dictatorship and threats to American security, there has never been a better time to focus on the process of state-building. Attention to research that outlines the factors that promote successful transformation of core state institutions is therefore crucial.